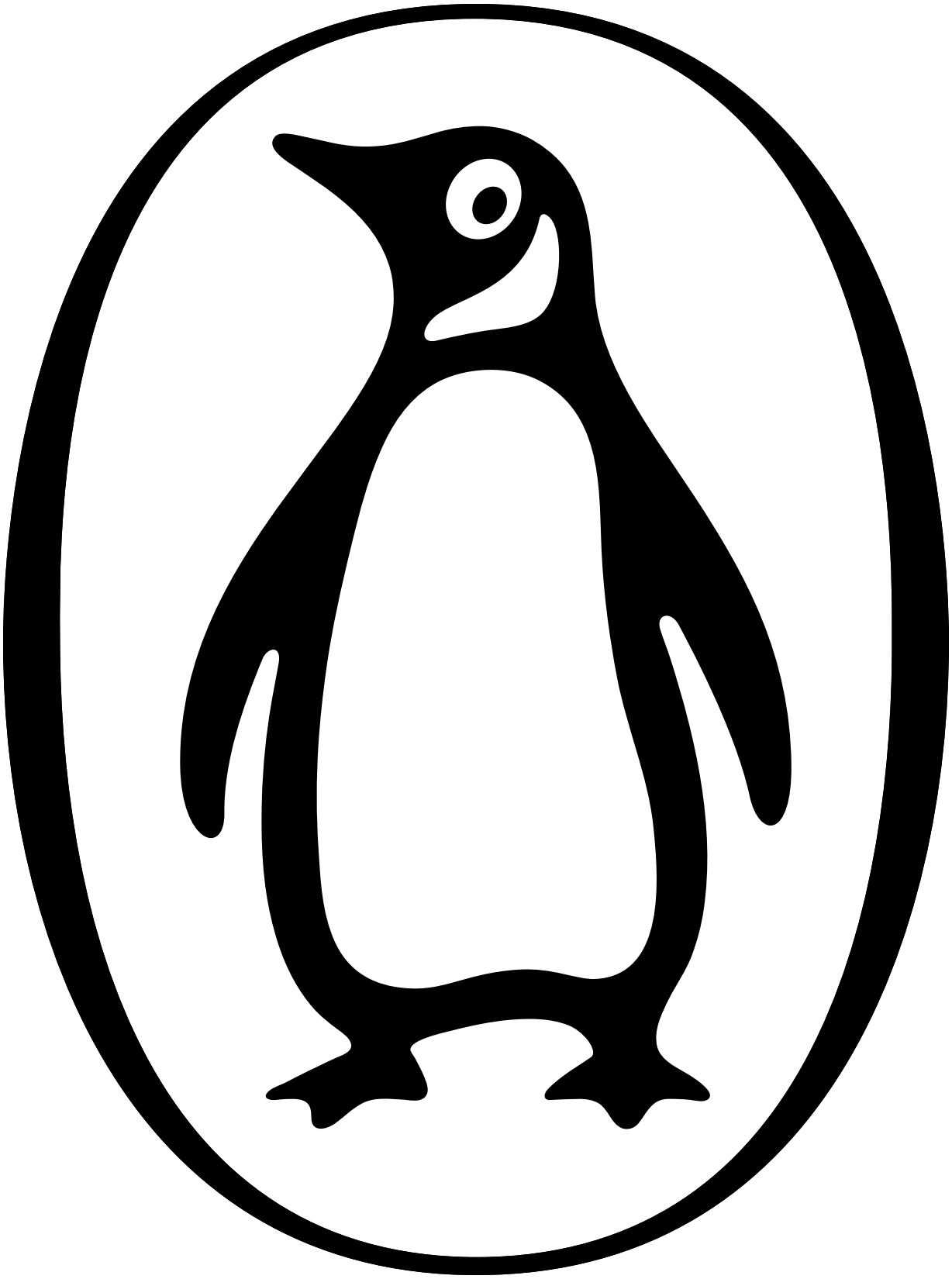
PENGUIN CLASSICS

HILDEGARD OF BINGEN

Selected Writings



PENGUIN CLASSICS

HILDEGARD OF BINGEN: SELECTED WRITINGS

HILDEGARD OF BINGEN was born into a noble family in Bermersheim in 1098. At the age of eight her family gave her into the care of a religious noblewoman, Jutta of Spanheim, who took Hildegard with her to become a recluse at the Disibodenberg monastery. Some time between 1112 and 1115, when the monastery became a convent, Hildegard took religious vows.

After Jutta's death in 1136, Hildegard was elected abbess at Disibodenberg. At this time she started to write about the visions she had been experiencing. Her first work, *Scivias*, appeared with Papal approval in 1151, just after she had established her own religious community at Rupertsberg, near Bingen. Her collection of religious songs, the *Symphonia*, appeared in 1158. She then produced a number of other works, including *The Book of Life's Merits (c*. 1163*), The Book of Divine Works (c*. 113*),* lives of local saints, and various musical, scientific and medical works. She also invented a private language, which formed the basis of two short works, *The Unknown Language* and *The Unknown Alphabet* (both completed by 1158). Hildegard was by this time regarded as a mystic and prophetess, and she came to be known as the 'Sibyl of the Rhine'. In about 1158 she undertook the first of her preaching tours throughout Germany, a very unusual venture for a medieval abbess. This was followed by three further tours in 1160, 1161–3 and 1170–71. She founded a second monastery at Eibingen in 1165.

Hildegard died in 1179. She was celebrated as a saint in the Rhineland and in the fifteenth century her feast day was established as 17 September.

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Hildegard of Bingen

SELECTED WRITINGS

Translated with an introduction and notes by

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PENGUIN BOOKS

PENGUIN BOOKS

Published by the Penguin Group
Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England
Penguin Putnam Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, USA
Penguin Books Australia Ltd, 250 Camberwell Road, Camberwell, Victoria 3124, Australia
Penguin Books Canada Ltd, 10 Alcorn Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4V 3B2
Penguin Books India (P) Ltd, 11 Community Centre, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi –110 017, India
Penguin Books (NZ) Ltd, Cnr Rosedale and Airborne Roads, Albany, Auckland, New Zealand
Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd, 24 Sturdee Avenue, Rosebank 2196, South Africa

Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

www.penguin.com

This translation first published in Penguin Books 2001
8

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ISBN: 9781101490839

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

I LIFE AND CAREER

II HILDEGARD IN HER TIME

III HILDEGARD'S WRITINGS

FURTHER READING

SELECT DISCOGRAPHY

CHRONOLOGY

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

KNOW THE WAYS

1. Letter to Bernard of Clairvaux
2. The Action of the Will (from *Scivias)*
3. Redemption (from *Scivias)*
4. Letter to Odo of Soissons
5. The Trinity (from *Scivias)*
6. Letter to Pope Eugenius III

STRUGGLES FOR INDEPENDENCE

7. Songs for Saint Disibod
8. Letter to Hartwig of Bremen
9. Song for Saint Ursula
10. The Trials of the Soul (from *Scivias)*
11. Songs for Saint Rupert
12. The Departure of Richardis of Stade

13. The First Version of *The Play of the Virtues* (from *Scivias)*

THE SIBYL OF THE RHINE

14. Three Political Letters
15. Songs for the Dedication of a Church
16. Teachings on the Church (from *Scivias)*
17. Letter to Elisabeth of Schönau
18. Gertrud of Stahleck
19. Letter to the Abbess of Bamberg

IN PRAISE OF CREATION

20. The Cosmic Egg (from *Scivias)*
21. The Cosmos (from *Causes and Cures)*
22. Gemstones (from *Physica)*
23. Songs from *Symphonia*
24. Two Christmas Homilies

ALLEGORIES OF JUSTICE AND LOVE

25. The Iron Mountain (from *Scivias)*
26. The Man Looking East and South (from *The Book of Life's Merits)*
27. The Seven Vices and Virtues (from *The Book of Life's Merits)*
28. The Voice from Heaven (from *The Book of Life's Merits)*
29. The Unknown Language
30. Allegorical Letters
31. A Vision of Love (from *The Book of Divine Works)*

HILDEGARD'S LIFE AND INFLUENCE

32. Queries and Requests: Selected Letters to Hildegard
33. From *The Life of Hildegard*, Book 2, by Theoderich of Echternach

34. Gebeno of Eberbach: The *Pentachronon*
35. From the Canonization Protocol

NOTES

GLOSSARY

INTRODUCTION

I. LIFE AND CAREER

1. *The making of a writer*

In 1146, an unknown and unpublished author, abbess of a small convent of nuns attached to the larger monastery of Disibodenberg in the Rhineland, sent a letter to the great churchman of her day, Bernard of Clairvaux. In her opening words, she emphasized Bernard's fame and her own unworthiness, before moving to her reason for writing. Despite her lack of education, the writer of the letter claimed she was filled with sophisticated and far-reaching theological visions and interpretations of the Bible. At the same time she also revealed that she was composing elaborate songs and music for use in church, again without having had any specific training. But – worried about pride and presumption – she was plagued with afflictions and doubts. Should she, a mere nun and uneducated woman, continue in such potentially reckless and inappropriate activities? The concluding request of her letter is couched in language and rhetoric the like of which Bernard had almost certainly never seen or heard before. Hildegard appeals to him in a series of injunctions, some conventional, others highly original. She entreats him not only 'by the brightness of the Father, by his wonderful Word', a familiar idea, but also 'by the sacred sound through which all creation resounds', a more unusual concept; and perhaps even more startling, 'by the Word from which all the world was created, by the height of the Father who through the sweet power of green vigour sent the Word to the Virgin's womb where it took on flesh like the honey in the honeycomb'.

What does she mean by some of these unusual ideas? The ‘sacred sound’ implies an idea of music as the essential fabric of the cosmos. There is a whole world of ideas behind this one phrase. The expression ‘green vigour’, or *viriditas* in the Latin of the original text, is similarly rich in connotations. For Hildegard, ‘greenness’ means the force which gives life to the body and renewal in nature; in a religious sense it signifies both the power of the Spirit at work in the world and the moral force that gives life and fruitfulness to human actions.

With hindsight, we can see the significance of such metaphors and concepts; they are the first expressions in writing of a new religious thinker who already at the time of writing has her own theology. Behind the final phrases of the letter to Bernard we detect a musician with her own philosophy of music, and an artist who – though no classical stylist – was a maker of fresh and startling images and ideas. Moreover, all this was expressed in a rough, unpolished Latin which Hildegard had acquired without formal study while singing the psalms and prayers of the monastic services in the daily life of her convent. Bernard was evidently impressed, for his short reply was positive. Which is somewhat surprising, given that he was a churchman of the twelfth century, a period in which anything new and strange in religion was probed carefully for heresy. And Bernard was no liberal in such matters: he had secured the prohibition of the teachings of the great Paris philosopher Peter Abelard and his supporter Arnold of Brescia, and at the time of Hildegard’s letter he was also agitating (unsuccessfully in this case) for the condemnation of the doctrines of Gilbert of Poitiers, a theologian who had made some unorthodox statements on the unity of the godhead. But at the Synod of Trier in the winter of 1147–8, Hildegard’s work in progress (possibly some sections of part II of her *Scivias*) was read out with interest by Pope Eugenius III and others. Bernard spoke in her favour, and papal approval was given for its publication.

Within a few years, Hildegard of Bingen had become a religious, moral and political adviser to half of Europe, as her voluminous

correspondence shows. Credited with prophetic insights, the ‘Sibyl of the Rhine’ was frequently consulted, and on the basis of her authority as a prophet, undertook what for a woman was almost unheard of: four preaching tours through the heartlands of the German Empire. She began her preaching in 1158, at the age of sixty, and the first tour took her along the Main, stopping at Mainz, Wertheim, Würzburg, Kitzingen, Ebrach and Bamberg, preaching in churches and cathedrals and visiting abbeys and monasteries. A further three tours followed. In 1160, she preached publicly in Trier, attacked the lax clergy for not ‘blowing the trumpet of God’s justice’, then proceeded along the River Mosel to Metz. Between 1161 and 1163 she followed the Rhine northwards to Werden on the Ruhr, stopping at Cologne, where she preached on the dangers of the Cathar movement (on which more below). Finally, from 1170 to 1171, she was in Swabia. Here, as a letter to Werner of Kirchheim reveals, she preached to a community of priests on the topic of the Church, which she saw as a mystical female figure towering to the heavens (like Lady Philosophy in Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy*) but whose white robe was torn and dishevelled.[1] In true Gregorian reformist manner, she called for the clerics to end their neglect of the Church, to lead celibate lives and to stop chasing after preferments.

There are no descriptions of these journeys other than the letters in which Hildegard sent copies of her sermons to the communities she had visited, but the requests reveal how well she was received. Although her decision to undertake such tours was clearly justified by their reception, they were highly irregular. The enormity of the step she took is perhaps appreciated when it is recalled that Benedictine nuns could not leave their cloister without special permission, and only priests were allowed to preach. But Hildegard had the authority of her vocation and a strength of character which brooked almost no opposition.

Rooting her ideas in what she called her ‘vision’, a religious experience of the ‘living light’, she set herself the task of writing an encyclopedic survey of theological knowledge. Her basic method

was to present a particular 'vision' with all its imagery and detail in a coherent picture, both as a text and, in some manuscripts, as an illustration. Shown in this way the picture would take on a life of its own, almost like a myth, but remain at the same time something mysterious, 'a mystical vision' as she called it, demanding a key to its meaning. This she would then set out to give, explaining the content of the picture she had created and making it relevant to her contemporary audience. The dozens of visions were subsequently arranged into a series of three interconnected books: *Scivias*, or *Know the Ways* (completed in 1151), *The Book of Life's Merits* (1163), and *The Book of Divine Works* (1173). The trilogy became her life's work: a body of writing based on 'visions' but covering a wide area of teaching: from knowledge about the cosmos, explanations of the meaning of the Trinity and other religious ideas to interpretations of passages in the Bible, ethical and social problems, and pastoral care and medicine.

Particularly in the first half of her career, Hildegard composed choral music for the liturgy, collecting the various pieces in her work the *Symphony of the Harmony of Celestial Revelations* (1158). It is these songs, which have survived as text with neums (medieval musical notation) and are now recorded in a number of versions, that have brought renewed fame to Hildegard in the present day.

Several additional works should be noted. Hildegard wrote 'non-visionary' prose, in particular two treatises on medicine and the natural world known as *Causes and Cures* and *Physica*, both completed by 1158. As with the songs, great attention has recently been given to these writings after a long neglect. In particular, her emphasis on wholeness, balance and diet has given them renewed currency among today's readership. During the same period of activity, as the preface to her *Book of Life's Merits* reveals, she also compiled her 'replies and admonitions', i.e. the first collected edition of her letters, as well as various minor writings: a commentary on the Gospels, an explanation of the Athanasian Creed and a commentary on the Benedictine Rule for Monasteries. There later followed the *Life of St Disibod*, the *Life of St Rupert* and the

Solutions to Thirty-Eight Questions. Finally, mention should be made of two works (composed 1151–8) in which Hildegard revealed a fascination with language and the invention of private languages: *The Unknown Language* and *The Unknown Alphabet*. In the decade after her death in 1179, most of her large corpus of writings was gathered together and edited in one volume at the Rupertsberg, the monastery she herself had founded in about 1150; the result is the so-called 'giant' book or codex, usually referred to by its German title, the *Riesenkodex*.

2. *Sketch of Hildegard's life*

Hildegard's inner life was frequently turbulent, but outwardly the routine of the convent remained a highly ordered, regular round of singing the monastic 'offices', or services, at set times throughout the day as prescribed in the Benedictine Rule for Monasteries. It should be remembered that one of Hildegard's main purposes in composing music was to supplement the daily round with short pieces – antiphons and responsories – which could be included at suitable points in the course of the liturgy of the offices. Given the regularity of her everyday life, the main external events of her biography can be quickly told.

For the first forty-two years of her life Hildegard led a sheltered existence, much of it within the walls of a monastery. Born at Bermersheim in 1098 into a well-established noble family, she was given to the monastic life as a young child; according to Guibert's *Life of Hildegard*, her parents felt a need to offer their tenth and youngest child as a 'tithe', to be presented to the Church in dedication. In Hildegard's case the dedication as 'oblate' took place with her full agreement, although, as we shall see, she objected strongly to the practice of dedicating oblates to monasteries without their consent. According to Theoderich's *Life of Hildegard*, Hildegard was aged eight at the time, and she was put into the care of a pious noblewoman called Jutta of Spanheim, presumably at her household in nearby Spanheim itself. Rather than immediately entering an

anchorage (as told in the now traditional account based on Theoderich's *Life*) it now seems likely that she remained at Spanheim for a number of years while Jutta looked for a suitable convent. The Annals of Disibodenberg report that on 29 June 1108 the foundation stone of the newly rebuilt monastery of Disibodenberg was laid by its abbot, Burchard. For reasons not recorded, Jutta decided on this as the site of her retreat from the world. Accordingly, as details in the anonymous *Life of Jutta* indicate, Jutta became a recluse attached to the monastery in 1112, taking Hildegard and another young dedicatee with her. The anchorage soon became a convent at what was in effect a double monastery (with two separate houses on the same site for monks and nuns). Subsequently, at some point in the next four years, Hildegard spoke her vows and assumed the veil of a nun.

The following twenty years passed without notice, but when Jutta died in 1136, the nuns chose Hildegard as her successor. Having achieved a secure position, Hildegard felt able to tell selected friends about her visionary experiences and creative abilities. Encouraged by her friend the monk Volmar, schoolmaster of the monastery, she began in 1141 to put her 'vision' into writing. Work continued until the eventful synod of 1147–8, when, prompted by Kuno, the abbot of Disibodenberg, and supported by Heinrich, the archbishop in the local diocese of Mainz, she presented it for papal approval.

The result of this synod has already been told, and from this point on Hildegard's life was transformed as she assumed the active role of author, preacher, counsellor and (to use a modern term) a form of therapist. More of the details of this new role will emerge as we consider her letters, her trilogy and other individual works. But apart from the preaching journeys, and the foundation of Eibingen in 1165, her active career is marked by drastic events only at its beginning and end.

Soon after the Synod of Trier, her outer circumstances changed. In about 1150, as she was completing *Scivias*, she abandoned the monks at Disibodenberg and set up her own foundation at

Rupertsberg. At first, resources were limited for the abbess and her small band of twenty or so nuns, and the situation was exacerbated by active opposition to the move on the part of Abbot Kuno of Disibodenberg. Meanwhile, in the face of the hardships, various nuns left the Rupertsberg for elsewhere. These included the nun Adelheid, who became abbess of Gandersheim, and Hildegard's close friend Richardis of Stade, who moved to Bassum; in both cases there seem to have been family and political connections involved in the appointments. The departure of Richardis was a bitter disappointment for Hildegard, which is recorded graphically in one of her letters translated below. To solve the financial situation of the convent, Hildegard made a surprise visit to Kuno and secured an agreement for the support of the nuns (the money was owed to them as revenue from lands given to the monastery by their wealthy relatives). Before the deal was ratified, however, Kuno died in 1155, and the dispute was renewed under his successor, Abbot Helenger, who tried to secure the return to Disibodenberg of the invaluable Volmar, who was still supporting Hildegard in her writing work. Eventually, by appeals to the diocese, in particular to Arnold, Archbishop of Mainz, two charters were obtained in 1158 which secured the nuns' property and arranged for pastoral and priestly visits from Disibodenberg to Rupertsberg.

At the end of her life, the daily routines of the convent and, what was worse, the very achievements of Hildegard's career were threatened by wholly unexpected circumstances. A young nobleman, who had been excommunicated, died after reconciling himself with the Church and receiving the sacraments from a priest. He was buried in the convent cemetery. Though everything had proceeded correctly, this event had repercussions. Alleging that he had still been excommunicant at the time of his death, the prelates of the diocese of Mainz ordered his body to be removed. Hildegard refused to do this. The prelates accordingly placed an interdict over the Rupertsberg, forbidding the nuns to take part in communion or to sing the liturgy, and they were allowed to say their prayers and readings only in muffled tones. In a medieval Christian context, and

particularly in the situation of a convent, where the mass, the psalms and the offices were the very lifeblood of their existence, the nuns were devastated, or, in their own words, 'afflicted with much bitterness' and 'oppressed by a great sadness.' Hildegard herself, who set so much store by music as 'the sacred sound through which all creation resounds', was beside herself. A letter written during this dispute is particularly interesting, for here Hildegard was compelled to put her views on music into writing in order to appeal for a lifting of the ban on the singing of the liturgy. After various visits and appeals, in which – as the letters and biography reveal – the local rivalries between the diocese of Mainz and that of Cologne also played a role, the interdict was finally lifted. For the last few months of her life Hildegard's activities returned to the normal Benedictine routine of prayer and praise to which her vocation had called her.

II. HILDEGARD IN HER TIME

1. *The Cistercians*

The period in which Hildegard lived was a time of great renewal, often referred to as the Twelfth-Century Renaissance.[2] One driving force was the new monastic order of the Cistercians, an offshoot of the Benedictine Order, who called for a return to the basics of the Benedictine Rule, including simplicity of worship (in contrast to the elaborate rituals of the established Cluniac monasteries), and manual labour; they also emphasized the role of meditation and reading.[3] The most important personality of Cistercian monasticism was clearly Bernard of Clairvaux, who taught the future Pope Eugenius III. Bernard's writings, mostly spiritual and contemplative, were extremely influential in the period, and his political influence was immense. Here, to give a brief example, is an admonition from his *On Consideration,* a series of reflections on government which he addressed to Pope Eugenius III:

See where your accursed occupations are bound to drag you if you carry on as you have begun, that is to say, giving yourself wholly to them and saving nothing of yourself for you. You are wasting time and, if I may play Jethro to your Moses, you, like him, are wearing yourself out in foolish labour over things which are nothing but an affliction of spirit, the dissipation of your mental energies and an expense of grace. And what does it yield you in the end but cobwebs?[4]

On a humorous note, Bernard could also write a satirical view of a wealthy Cluniac abbot travelling round the country in a grand style with all his rich household goods and 'sixty or more horses in his train'.[5] Another note is sounded in his advice in a letter to Oger, canon of Mont-Saint-Éloui:

Let us rest our brains from composition, our lips from speaking, our hands from writing and our messengers from scurrying back and forth, but let our minds never rest from meditating day and night on the law of the Lord, which is the law of love.[6]

Like Hildegard after him, Bernard was a great writer of letters to all and sundry; it is interesting to compare their styles and to note the freedom of expression which both felt, for very different reasons, when addressing the same correspondent, Pope Eugenius III himself.

Another key figure in the Cistercian order was Ælred of Rievaulx, author of the classic *On Spiritual Friendship* (1150–65). Though written for men, and probably not read by Hildegard, this book points to a warm, emotional side in monastic life:

Those who have none to share in their good fortune or their grief, none on whom they can unload their troubles, no one to whom they can communicate some sudden glorious illumination are like brute beasts. 'Woe unto him who is alone, for when he falls he has none to lift him up!' … But what happiness, security and joy to have another self to talk with![7]

The ideas expressed here help to explain the strong bond of affection felt between the two friends Hildegard and Richardis, or between Hildegard the author and Volmar the scribe and adviser.[8]

2. *Twelfth-century humanists*

By the twelfth century the cathedral schools were gaining increasingly in importance, particularly in Paris. These placed considerable emphasis on the liberal arts and sciences of classical antiquity, particularly those of Rome; works of Greek origin also came to be known in Latin translation, including Plato's *Timœus* in the version by Chalcidius, and works on physics by Aristotle and on astronomy by Ptolemy. New scientific and medical knowledge from the Arab world also made its way into Europe through the experience of the Crusades.

Typical classical humanists of the period are John of Salisbury, who studied under Bernard of Chartres, and Gerald of Wales, who studied in Paris from 1165 to 1174. Both authors are entirely at home in the liberal arts of the *trivium* (the syllabus of grammar, logic and rhetoric which was the staple diet of the medieval schools). Frequently they surprise the modern reader with their free and easy acquaintance with classical poets such as Virgil, Ovid and Horace, whose themes they adopt and whose works they ceaselessly quote and allude to. Another lesser figure of the same type is Guibert of Gembloux, Hildegard's secretarial assistant in her later years, who appears to have taken more pains to smooth and polish Hildegard's Latin than did Volmar (who presumably just tidied up the grammatical endings). Such writers, mostly men educated in elitist systems, are a contrast to Hildegard, a nun and Benedictine, who rarely cites anything recognizable as a direct classical allusion.[9]

For much of his career, John of Salisbury acted as secretary to Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury under Henry II, King of England, and had contacts with Pope Eugenius III. A letter of 1167, written around the time when the imperial army under Frederick Barbarossa had invaded Italy and taken Rome, is interesting for its mention of Hildegard and her remarkable prophetic writings. John has heard of a book, probably the *Scivias*, which he would like to consult; but this is an age of manuscripts, when books were published by the slow process of sending them to scribes to be carefully copied. So he asks his correspondent, Master Gerard

Pucelle, to look through the book while he is abroad to see what he can find:

> If you do not come on anything else not available to our folk, at least the visions and prophecies of the blessed and most famous Hildegard are available to you. I hold her in commendation and reverence since Pope Eugenius cherished her with an intimate bond of affection. Look carefully too and let me know whether anything was revealed to her at the end of this schism.[10]

Humanist and classicist as he was, John was willing to credit Hildegard with another kind of writing than that of his own.

John of Salisbury's teacher Bernard of Chartres once famously remarked that his contemporaries were like 'dwarfs, standing on the shoulders of the giants' of the classical past. The remark expresses well the interest many of these scholars had in recovering more of the lost science and knowledge of Greek and Roman antiquity, and with the twelfth-century Renaissance came a renewed interest in classical science. Notable achievements here are the writings on logic of the famous and flamboyant Parisian scholar Peter Abelard, who was vehemently opposed by Bernard of Clairvaux. Other twelfth-century humanists interested in science include William of Conches, who among his more original writings also commented on the works of the late antique philosopher Boethius. Boethius's cosmology was studied with a renewed fervour in this period, along with the allegorical methods of Macrobius in his commentary on the *Dream of Scipio*. Pursuing such studies, Bernard Silvester and Alan of Lille gave new forms to cosmology in long, allegorical poems. Their use of allegory to devise innovative ways of looking at the works of nature and the cosmos is clearly of relevance to Hildegard's trilogy, although we must be wary of identifying any direct influences other than the general trends of the time. As has been noted, within a year of each other (1147–8) both Bernard Silvester's allegorical poem *Cosmographia* and Hildegard's *Scivias* were approved by Pope Eugenius III.

3. *Mystical practices*

A key figure in the Latin literature and theology of the period was a master at Paris in the early part of the century. The name he is known by is Hugh of St Victor, and he came from a community of canons regular living under a rule at St Victor in Paris. Founded in 1113, the Victorine house had links with St Bernard, who helped to formulate its 'customs'. Many famous scholars, mystics and poets originated there, including Hugh, who was probably best known as author of the textbook *Didascalicon*. A useful and all-embracing survey of the arts, Hugh's work was widely used in the schools, but it also had a further significance. The book gave a philosophical underpinning to monastic ideas and practices, and in so doing, emphasized the value of reading (*lectio divina*) and meditation (*meditatio*), two types of activity encouraged by the Benedictines and the Cistercians. Hugh certainly did not originate such already traditional practices, but his definitions give us insights into the way many men and women lived the life of study and prayer in this period.

According to his approach, meditation was the practice of reading aloud and pondering with the whole person – not only with memory, will and attention, but also with body, mind and spirit – on the meaning of the text. In effect, the meditator had to learn the text by heart and so put its theory into practice. By contrast, reading, so defined, was a more careful and guided study of the text, using scholarly aids and commentaries. Meditation could precede reading, but reading aided further, advanced levels of memory and meditation, which allowed the mind to soar, as it were, to heights of devotion and understanding.

Such practices are immediately relevant to writers whom we know to come from a monastic background. Hildegard is no exception, and we are fortunate in this respect to have the letter she wrote in reply to the questions of Guibert of Gembloux, the scholar who eventually became her secretary in the 1170s after the death of Volmar. One passage is particularly relevant in the light of Hugh's analysis of meditation. Hildegard is in the process of explaining the nature of her visions, and how they come to her in her soul while

she is in a waking state, and not in some kind of trance (as in the case of her fellow visionary Elisabeth):

> The light which I see is not confined to one place, but it is far, far brighter than a cloud which carries the sun; nor can I gauge its height or length or breadth, and it is known to me by the name of the 'reflection of the living light'. And just as the sun, the moon and the stars appear in the waters, so the Scriptures, sermons and virtues and certain works that humans have wrought, shine on me brightly in this light.[11]

Following this mystical explanation, Hildegard continues to describe how her memory and understanding work on the vision:

> Whatever I see or learn in this vision, I hold in my memory for a long time; so that I can recall whatever I have seen or heard; and I simultaneously see and hear and understand and, as it were, learn in this moment, what I understand. But what I do not see, I do not understand, because I am unlearned. And the words which I write I have seen and heard in the vision; nor do I put down words other than those I hear in the vision, and I present them in Latin, unpolished, just as I hear them in the vision. For I am not taught in this vision to write as the philosophers write; and the words in this vision are not like those which sound from the mouth of man, but like a trembling flame, or like a cloud stirred by the clear air.[12]

If, as seems likely, Hildegard practised meditative reading on a wide variety of texts, seeing them, reading them and hearing them in her mind, then we are close to knowing, at least in part, how she acquired the breadth and depth of knowledge which we frequently encounter, behind the prophetic persona, in most of her works.

4. *Theological writers*

In the theology of the twelfth century, a new tendency was to produce encyclopedic works covering all aspects of Christian doctrine. In this tradition the great figure of Peter Lombard stands out from all the others, his celebrated *Sentences (c.* 1155–8) becoming the principal textbook of theology in succeeding centuries and setting a standard which was hard to surpass. Nevertheless, there were other writings of this sort from earlier in the century, one notable example being Hugh of St Victor's *On the Sacraments of*

the Christian Faith (c. 1134) with many similarities of content to Hildegard's own *Scivias*.

Honorius 'of Autun' – who was possibly a German writer – also produced large works of popular theology, sometimes sensational and even grotesque by the standards of today, in which he aimed to present basic principles of theology for the instruction of priests. His *Elucidarium*, for instance, has a superficial similarity to Hildegard's *Scivias* in its three-part survey of theology, Christian anthropology and eschatology, though it is presented in the form of a dialogue between master and pupil rather than the visionary form of Hildegard's work.

Another large-scale work aimed at a popular audience was compiled by Herrad of Landsberg. Herrad, in charge of a house of canonesses at Hohenbourg near Strasbourg, supervised the compilation of her *Garden of Delights* between 1160 and 1170. This work was a systematic textbook of word, image and music containing hymns, liturgy, Bible commentary, history, Church law and popular doctrine drawn verbatim from a variety of sources, including Honorius of Autun and Peter Lombard. A whole series of didactic illustrations occurred in the book, and its Latin text was accompanied by numerous German glosses to assist in teaching to a vernacular audience.

5. *The role of women*

As a female author, Herrad seems to have been an exceptional case. Many women who composed works of literature in the period were not in fact 'writers' in the strict sense of the word, since they employed secretaries and scribes to write down their compositions from dictation. A classic example is Hildegard's younger contemporary and correspondent, Elisabeth of Schönau. Apparently illiterate (at least in the sense of being unable to write Latin), she experienced her visions in a state of trance (in contrast to Hildegard's waking experience of 'vision') and dictated her experiences to her brother Eckbert, a priest in Cologne. Less learned

than Hildegard, Elisabeth nevertheless has a similar sense of her prophetic vocation, and she compares herself to Old Testament figures such as Huldah,[13] Deborah, Judith and Jahel, for 'while the men were given over to sluggishness, holy women were filled with the spirit of God, that they might prophesy, govern God's people forcefully, and indeed triumph over the foes of Israel'.[14] In general, there was probably little choice: women were constrained either to adopt prophetic roles or not to write at all. However, a notable contrast to both Hildegard and Elisabeth is the case of Marie de France, a French speaker living in England, who wrote her courtly *Lais* about romantic liaisons and other worldly adventures. It should also be remembered that women were not the only writers to embrace the prophetic genre. The most famous prophetic persona of the period, apart from Hildegard, is her younger contemporary Joachim of Fiore (*c*. 1135–1202), the biblical exegete and mystic who divided the history of the world into the 'Three Ages' of the Father, the Son and the Spirit. Joachim was unwillingly elected abbot of Corazzo in 1177 and retired to the Sila Mountains in 1196.

6. *Vernacular literature*

The mention of Marie de France recalls a whole literary world only intermittently visible in the surviving records of the first half of the twelfth century. This is the world of court performance and vernacular literature: the epic, lyric and romance enjoyed by the class of knights and their ladies, an aristocratic world from which Hildegard and many of her nuns came. That she was not unacquainted with such literature is indicated by a reference to the story of the maiden and the unicorn in one of her late letters, to Ludwig of Trier:[15]

> Meanwhile you have embarked on an adventure of the unicorn – unknown to you in your youth – and this indeed was my writing, which often carries echoes of the mortal dress of the son of God, who, loving a maidenly nature, resting in it like the unicorn in the maiden's lap, gathered the whole Church to himself with the sweetest sound of fair believing.

This story derives from Isidore and antiquity, but it was used frequently in the Latin and vernacular bestiaries that flourished in the Middle Ages. Of literature extant in the German language from the period of Hildegard's life, some is based on classical models, for instance the *Alexander* by Lamprecht (1140s) or the *Eneit* of Heinrich von Veldeke (1170s). Other vernacular literature, however, had its origins in the contemporary aristocratic world. Above all the poetry of 'courtly love' (German *Minnesang*) was beginning to find expression, for instance in the 'falcon song' of a lady for her knight written by an Austrian poet known as Der von Kürenberc, datable to the 1160s:

> I raised me a falcon for more than a year.
> When I had tamed him as I would have him be
> and I had dressed his feathers with richly golden bands,
> aloft he soared, on high, and flew to other lands.[16]

Here new ideals of courtly behaviour, new expressions of secular love, and a new sensibility are expressed for the first time in the German language.

7. *Popular religious movements*

Yet another sensibility, this time of an extreme religious kind, was also making itself strongly felt by the time Hildegard began her writing career. In the 1140s the Cathar movement, originating in France, became popular in Germany, particularly in the Cologne area.[17] It was regarded as a threat to the stability of the Church, and leading figures of the region, such as Eckbert of Schönau, preached and wrote treatises against Cathar beliefs, which probably originated in the earlier religious group known as the 'Manichaean heresy.' In brief, the *Cathari* ('the pure ones') believed that everything to do with the body and the material world was evil, while only the soul was good. The consequences were twofold: on the one hand an extreme ascetism, particularly on the part of the so-called 'perfect' Cathar clergy who had renounced the material

world; on the other hand, a laissez-faire attitude, especially on the part of the Cathar laity, who allegedly lived as they pleased until they too made their renunciation at the end of their lives. Hildegard's positive view of material creation was naturally at odds with such dualist beliefs, and she preached a rousing sermon against them on her third preaching tour along the Rhine from 1161 to 1163.

8. *Political background*

The preaching tours are an example of where Hildegard the Benedictine nun came into direct personal contact with the outside world. Another instance is in 1163, when she secured from the Emperor an assurance that his troops would protect the Rupertsberg and leave it undamaged. Her need for such a safeguard takes us into the heart of a bitter dispute between German emperor and Roman pope that plagued the political life of the twelfth century.

Since the time of Charlemagne, the kings of Germany had claimed the additional title of King of the Romans, as though they had somehow acquired access, through their illustrious predecessor Charlemagne, to the glorious heritage of the Roman Empire. In addition, they had also exerted considerable influence in the administration of the Church in their own lands. In 1073, however, the zealous reformer Hildebrand was elected to the papal throne. One of the first actions of Pope Gregory VII, as he was now called, was to attack what he regarded as abuses in the Church or limitations on his papal authority. The two main abuses were clerical marriage, a perennial issue, and simony, which literally meant the sale of 'holy things', but in this context meant the sale and purchase of bishoprics, abbacies and other ecclesiastical offices. In attacking the latter abuse in particular, Gregory was following a policy set by his predecessors. His major new move, however, was to assert his power over and against the German king, Henry IV, particularly over the question of the right to appoint bishops. This

dispute, with setbacks for Henry at Canossa and for Gregory in exile at the end of his life, set patterns for the twelfth century.

By Hildegard's time these had changed very little, and from 1160 Frederick Barbarossa (King and now also Emperor of Germany) and Pope Alexander III became embroiled in a seventeen-year schism with little compromise on either side. Frederick three times appointed his own rival candidates to the papal throne, the so-called 'antipopes', and the imperial-papal wars dragged on. Hildegard, who supported the Pope, nevertheless aimed to preserve good relations with the Emperor, hence her concern to protect her abbey from attack by imperial troops. A number of oblique references to the current political situation survive in the correspondence, and some knowledge of events is necessary to detect them, particularly when they are couched in the apocalyptic imagery and other metaphors which Hildegard so loved to use. Her letters to Frederick, in particular, show an increasingly aggressive tone on her part as she sought to influence him towards reconciliation and an ending of the schism.

III. HILDEGARD'S WRITINGS

1. *A repertoire of images*

In Hildegard's first securely datable piece of writing, the letter to Bernard of 1146, we have a case of a writer seeking reassurance for unpublished literary work that was already highly developed. It is a curious mixture of doubt and insecurity blended with a confident style. A similar effect is given in another early letter, her first to Pope Eugenius III, probably written shortly after the Synod of Trier. To explain her complex feelings, Hildegard made use of an image of a feather lifted up on the wind:

> A strong king sat in his hall, high pillars before him covered in gold bands and adorned with pearls and precious stones. And the king chose to touch a tiny feather, so that it soared up marvellously, and a strong wind bore it up so that it did not fall.

The image derives partly from the courtly world of the German aristocracy to which Hildegard belonged and partly from the Bible and the monastic liturgy with which she had been familiar all her life. The same fable or parable occurs in the letter to Odo of Soissons, here with an exegesis of its symbolic meaning:

Listen now: a king sat on his throne, high pillars before him splendidly adorned and set on pediments of ivory. They showed the king's vestments in great honour everywhere. Then the king chose to lift a small feather from the ground, and he commanded it to fly just as the king himself wished. But a feather does not fly of its own accord; it is borne up by the air. So too I am not imbued with human doctrine or strong powers. Nor do I desire good bodily health. Rather, I depend entirely on God's help.

Hildegard herself is the feather and she derives her support from the air that bears her up; in short, the air is the divine strength on which she draws and the breath of inspiration which she needs for all her ventures into the world of writing and teaching.

As the early writings and letters show, Hildegard had a repertoire of such images which she developed while writing *Scivias* and continued to employ to good effect in much of her correspondence. In the *Scivias* the feudal and courtly images of king and retainer, lord and servant, are particularly striking, often blended with material from biblical parables, as in this stern parable about the magic arts from *Scivias* I, 3, 23:

A lord, who had many servants under him, issued each of the servants with weapons and said, 'Prove yourselves worthy and useful. Cast away from you all slackness and indolence.' But when they were travelling with him on a journey, the servants saw a magician – a false illusionist – at the side of the road.

Deceived, some of them said, 'Let us learn this man's tricks!' And they threw away the weapons they had with them and ran to him.

The others said to them, 'What are you doing, following this illusionist and provoking our lord's anger?'

And they replied, 'How does it harm our lord?'

But their lord said to them, 'You wicked servants! Why did you throw away the weapons I gave you? And why do you prefer to love vanity rather than serving me your lord, whose servants you are? Follow this magician if you will, since you do not want to work in my service, and see what good your folly will do you!' And he rejected them.

The model provided by biblical parables is strongly influential in the following story, from *Scivias* I, 2, 32, in which Hildegard

develops her motif of the ‘pearl’ as a symbol for humanity:

The same lord who lost his sheep but so gloriously restored it to its life, also owned a costly pearl. The same happened again: the pearl was lost, and it fell into the ugly dirt. But he did not leave it lying in the dirt. He lifted it out carefully, and he cleaned it of the mud into which it had fallen, like gold purified in the furnace. He restored it to its former beauty till it gleamed even brighter than before.

The probable sources of this story reveal something of Hildegard’s methods as a maker of new narratives. The basic message is the same as that of the parable of the Lost Sheep (Matthew 18:12–14), but she draws on other New Testament passages such as the parable of the Costly Pearl for which a merchant sold everything he had (Matthew 13:45–6). There is perhaps also an echo of the command not to ‘cast your pearls before swine’ (Matthew 7:6), since if they lie in the mud they are useless. Taken together these echoes of Hildegard’s biblical reading blend into a new motif which she can add to the storehouse of her memory and bring out for use when appropriate.[18]

Images of animals also feature in the repertoire. In the letter to Bernard, Hildegard can picture her correspondent as strong, like an eagle staring at the sun, an idea taken ultimately from the medieval bestiary tradition. In another letter, to Pope Eugenius III, the emperor is a bear stooping to grasp a precious stone (i.e. the Church) in his paw, but frustrated at the last minute by the papal eagle that swoops down and snatches the stone away (*6* in the present selection). In another mixed fable, in *Scivias* I, 3, 29, the foolhardy young goat that attacks the stag becomes linked with the sheep of various biblical stories:[19]

[The word of the Lord:] In your foolishness you want to grasp me with threats such as this: ‘If God wants me to be just and good, why does he not make me that way?’ You want to catch me like the presumptuous young goat that attacks the stag. He is caught and pinned down by the mighty antlers. If you try your foolhardy strength against me, you will be brought down in the court of justice by the precepts of my law like the horns of the stag. The horns are trumpets ringing in your ears, yet you do not heed them, but run after the wolf, thinking you have tamed him so that he will not hurt you. But the wolf swallows you up, saying: ‘This sheep has wandered from the path; it refused to follow its shepherd and ran after me. So I will keep it, because it chose me and deserted its shepherd.’ Human

being! God is just, and therefore he has ordained all he has made, in heaven and earth, with justice and order.

Another chain of associated imagery develops the notion of 'greenness' into one of gardens, vineyards, fields and pastures. The origin of this idea is the greenness of paradise, which in Hildegard's view (in *Scivias* I, 2, 38) is a vital force still connected to the earth, just as the soul is connected to the body:

Paradise is a pleasant place, flourishing in the fresh greenness of flowers and herbs and the delights of all spices, filled with exquisite perfumes, adorned for the joys of the blessed. It provides the dry earth with fortifying moisture and gives its vital force to the earth, just as the soul provides the body with its vital forces, for paradise is not darkened by any shadow of sinners.

An opposition is set up here in which moisture and greenness are associated with paradise, and dryness with the earth. Elsewhere, the same opposition is carried over from theological themes to ethical issues. An example is *Scivias* II, 5, 46 (16), where the theme of the green garden is further adapted. First, in a style reminiscent of the early medieval sermon in the tradition of Caesarius of Arles, the reader or listener is challenged to consider what makes a cultivated field fruitful. A man can sow a field, Hildegard writes, but it is divine power that sends 'the moisture of fresh greenness and the warmth of sunlight' which cause the crop to bear fruit. In the same way, she continues, a person can 'sow a word' in another's ear, but only God can send irrigation and 'bring forth the fruit of holiness'. Using this image then, and drawing ultimately on Gregory the Great's notion in his *Pastoral Care* of teaching as 'sowing words' in the heart of the learner, Hildegard goes on to attack the frequent twelfth-century practice of dedicating young children to the monastic life against their will:

And how could you move the child consecrated in baptism and without his consent deliver him up by the worst of deceptions, forcing him to bear my yoke? And so he could be neither green nor dry, since he had not died to the world and did not live for the world either. Why did you push him so far that he could do neither one nor the other?

By all accounts, Hildegard undertook such a life willingly; her life was ‘green’ rather than ‘dry’. But she must have known of less successful cases, and she is concerned to advise parents carefully on their responsibilities in such matters.

On other issues, and in particular instances also, Hildegard reuses the imagery of greenness. Thus in a letter to the Bishop of Bamberg she will plead the cause of the nun Gertrud of Stahleck, comparing her to a vineyard which needs to be given the opportunity to flourish (18). Such concrete images, often expanded into short narratives or parables, can express so much more than bald statements of the facts. In adopting this style, often, as she says, under divine inspiration, Hildegard can involve her reader, engage the will and emotions, even provoke changes of action or lifestyle.

2. *The visionary method*

We cannot know for certain which part of the *Scivias* was read by Eugenius III at the Synod of Trier in 1147–8. Nevertheless, some indication is given by a letter of 1148–50 to a Paris master, Odo of Soissons, which shares a number of themes with the first and second visions of part two of the *Scivias*. These themes were discussed at the Synod of Paris in 1148, when Gilbert of Poitiers risked condemnation by Bernard of Clairvaux and others for his views on the nature of God. But whether or not *Scivias* II, 1 was read at Trier, its content makes interesting reading (3). With its sophisticated ideas and often startling imagery, the vision is characteristic of Hildegard’s working practices. Already by 1150, she was approaching her mature style and method.

The opening page of *Scivias* II, 1 is immediately striking for the colourful and mysterious images in the illustration accompanying the text in the Rupertsberg manuscript. The viewer of the picture sees a variety of forms; up above are concentric circles of blue, red and gold; in the middle, sun, stars and planets, birds, beasts and fish; to the right and below, figures human and divine. For the reader of the text, too, the opening words are equally mysterious.

The author speaks of how she saw ‘a shining fire, unfathomable, inextinguishable, fully alive and existing full of life; with a flame the colour of the air, brightly burning in the gentle breeze’. This flame full of life is also active and eventful, for in the next instant the speaker sees the shining flame glow white. Evidently a moment of great expectancy and significance has arrived. The speaker then declares: ‘And suddenly a dark sphere of air appeared, huge in size, upon which the shining flame struck many blows, and at each blow a spark flew up so that soon the circle of air was brought to completion, and heaven and earth shone forth in the fullness of perfection.’ So the passage continues, in the style of a great and half-familiar myth. The reader feels there is a story to be understood with a depth and significance that only time and further study will reveal.

Here, then, is the essence of Hildegard’s ‘mystic vision’. This is a method: it is not simply a way of writing, but also a way of seeing. In origin, the story told above is the familiar account of the creation of ‘the heavens and the earth’, but its form and imagery are new in the twelfth century. It is akin to the idea that all the Sons of God danced for joy at the fashioning of the great artifice of the universe, and there are passages and paintings in Blake that are perhaps similar. From her own day of course we have the great allegorists such as Bernard Silvester with whom Hildegard might be compared. But Hildegard’s way of seeing is less learned and less literary than Bernard’s, her rough prose style more spontaneous than his polished and sophisticated Latin verse. Like Blake, she gives the impression that what appeared in her imagination is what she really saw.

This is the explicit claim she makes. As her opening words say, she is a human being with the ‘fragility’ of a woman, and ‘neither ablaze with the strength of strong lions nor learned in their exhalations’. In other words she has neither the energy nor the learning of the male scholar; she writes as she sees, and as her inspiration, ‘the voice from the living flame’, directs her:

> Nevertheless you are touched by my light, which touches your inner being with fire like the burning sun. Shout and tell! And write down these my mysteries which you see and

hear in the mystical vision! Do not be afraid, but tell the mysteries as you understand them in the spirit, as I speak them through you. May they be ashamed who should be showing righteousness to my people!

Hildegard is a prophet in the Old Testament tradition, touched by 'fire like the burning sun', rather like Ezekiel, or like Job and Hosea whom she quotes in the course of her vision. As a prophet, she has a social message for her contemporaries, which she spells out more fully in later sections of the *Scivias*, in her letters and sermons, and in her later writings. The message is urgent and demands to be told: it is the 'way of justice'.

Despite the sense of a calling and the apparently unstudied prophetic style, there is in the subsequent passages a strong undercurrent of intellectual thought and meditated reading. As Hildegard goes on to reveal in the next few sections of the vision, her writing has a very definite philosophy of God, and a distinct anthropology which places this author firmly at the centre of a major contemporary debate. Her first concern is to explain to her audience the concept of divine omnipotence; here, in her own way, Hildegard is speaking as a philosopher and contributing to the debate begun by Gilbert of Poitiers on the nature of God's unity, a debate in which she had taken an active part when requested by Odo of Soissons (for the correspondence, see 4 and 32). In *Scivias* she states that God 'remains "unfathomable", because he cannot be divided by any divisions, and he is without beginning or end, not to be comprehended by any glimmer of creaturely knowledge.'

In addition, and this should not be overlooked, Hildegard's vision is not merely a philosophical view of the created world, it is also a theological statement; the rest of *Scivias* II, 1 goes on to explain the details of the initial vision in terms of the religious understanding of the day. Following a teaching tradition that goes back to St Augustine's idea of the 'catechism of the unlearned', Hildegard in the one short piece covers creation, fall, the patriarchs and prophets, the defeat of the devil, redemption, Christ's resurrection and appearances to his followers, and finally the adornments of the Church as the bride of Christ; in brief, she gives a survey of

salvation history, all based on a step-by-step explication of the details of her vision. If this was the material that the Synod of Trier heard at their deliberations on Hildegard, it is little wonder that Eugenius and Bernard gave their approval for her to continue with her work.

3. *Picturing the moral life*

Written in 1158–63, the second volume of Hildegard's great trilogy is *The Book of Life's Merits,* which takes the visionary method of *Scivias* further, the emphasis falling now on the ethical and moral position of the human race within the divinely ordered universe. The book is divided into six parts (or chapters) describing six visions, each based on the symbolic figure of a divine Man standing on the earth and in the cosmos and looking in turn towards six different points of the compass. Each vision follows a set pattern: the Man is described, the events are narrated, then the vision as a whole is analysed into its components and explicated, first on a moral and then on an eschatological level.

In five of the six visions Hildegard deals with the struggle of the vices and virtues, as she does also in her *Play of the Virtues*. This theme goes back ultimately to the Late Roman Christian poet Prudentius, who wrote his 'Struggle for the Soul' or *Psychomachia* in about AD410. During the intervening centuries his depiction of seven virtues in single combat with seven vices received full and ample treatment in the works of many poets, artists and sculptors and became a rich field for further creative elaboration and embellishment. A similar *psychomachia* tradition – with eight opposing pairs of vices and virtues – goes back to the work of the eighth-century Anglo-Saxon writer Alcuin of York, who became the chief scholar and teacher at the school attached to the court of the emperor Charlemagne. Another treatise of this type, which certainly influenced Hildegard, is the *Conflict of Vices and Virtues* by Ambrosius Autpertus.[20] The attraction of the personification allegory, as many commentators have shown, is that it provided a

ready means for symbolizing – and at the same time showing – specific aspects of the mental, emotional and ethical life. Its popularity is seen in the later medieval Morality plays as well as its occasional use in other genres.[21] Personification is still used to an extent in today's psychotherapy, for instance in speaking of the Ego and the Id as separate entities within the human mind.

In Hildegard's *Book of Life's Merits*, the scheme begun by Prudentius is developed considerably, and turned into five sets of seven dramatic individual encounters between vices and virtues, each set being treated in a separate chapter of the book. Whereas in the traditional illustrations of the *Psychomachia* the allegorical personifications are shown as women, with little differentiation between the appearance of the vices and that of the virtues, in *The Book of Life's Merits* the vices are depicted in graphic – and grotesque – visual terms (reminiscent of the work of the much later artist Hieronymus Bosch), while the corresponding virtues remain invisible, usually as a voice of strength and power ('power' being another translation of the word *'virtus'*). Perhaps because of this contrast between visual vice and invisible virtue, there are, in contrast to the first and second volumes of the trilogy, no illustrations to accompany the text itself. Hildegard takes care to point out that the monstrous features of the vices are their symbolic rather than actual appearance, and she emphasizes various moral lessons to be drawn from them, sometimes taking biblical passages to illustrate her points.

4. *The voice of Love*

The culmination of the trilogy, begun in 1163 'when the apostolic throne was still being oppressed by the Roman Emperor, Frederick' and completed in a period of over ten years, is *The Book of Divine Works* (1173). In ten visions arranged in three parts, and centring on the statement 'In the beginning was the Word' from John's Gospel, Hildegard explores once again the themes of trinity, creation, microcosm and macrocosm, time and history. Many long sections

could be selected to illustrate the remarkable range of this book, which uses the visionary method of the *Scivias* often in an almost schematized allegorical mode, but then blends vision and explanation much more neatly into a unified whole. Thus the first vision begins with a picture of a composite winged figure, certainly human in form, and perhaps female:

> And I saw as amid the airs of the South in the mystery of God a beautiful and marvellous image of a human figure; her face was of such beauty and brightness that I could more easily have stared at the sun. On her head she had a broad band of gold. And in that golden band above her head there appeared a second face, like an old man, whose chin and beard touched the top of the first head. Wings protruded from behind the neck of the figure on either side, and rising up clear of the golden band their tips met and joined overhead. On the right, above the sweep of the wing, was an image of an eagle's head, and I saw it had eyes of fire in which there appeared the brilliance of angels as in a mirror. On the left, above the sweep of the wing, was the image of a human face, which shone like the brightness of the stars. These faces were turned towards the East.

Here, strangely fragmentary images and themes are juxtaposed: the figure of the human being, the head of the man, the wings, the form of the eagle and the bright human face. This is clearly an allegory in which the individual parts have significances separate from those of their role in the composition of the picture itself; in fact, all these individual parts are fully explained later in the exposition. Other features here are familiar from earlier parts of the trilogy: the geographically significant notion of the 'airs of the South', the theme of beauty and brightness, the motif of staring at the sun. The static features of this image take on life only when the female form actually begins to speak; only then do we realize the strength that lies behind Hildegard's writing at this late stage in her career, for at once we hear the words of a dynamic, caring, personal figure:

> The figure spoke: I am the supreme fire and energy. I have kindled all the sparks of the living, and I have breathed out no mortal things, for I judge them as they are. I have properly ordained the cosmos, flying about the circling circle with my wings, that is with my wisdom.

This is Love, the power that Boethius and after him Dante saw as holding, informing and quickening the whole of the cosmos. The figure is central to Hildegard's thought and feeling, a peculiarly

nurturing figure, with distinctly feminine features, the subject of one of Hildegard's justly famous songs, *O virtus sapientie*:

> Power of Wisdom,
> circling all things,
> comprehending all things,
> on one path, which has life.
>
> Three wings:
> one soars in the height,
> one exudes from the earth,
> one soars everywhere.
> Praise to you, as befits you, Wisdom.

In contrast to the song, the figure of Love speaks here in a voice which evokes all the forces of creation through which she moves:

I am the fiery life of divine substance, I blaze above the beauty of the fields, I shine in the waters, I burn in sun, moon, and stars. And I awaken all to life with every wind of the air, as with invisible life that sustains everything. For the air lives in greenness and fecundity. The waters flow as though they are alive. The sun also lives in its own light, and when the moon has waned it is rekindled by the light of the sun and thus lives again; and the stars shine out in their own light as though they are alive.

As the voice continues, the mystery of the divine power which Hildegard had treated twenty years before in *Scivias* takes on a renewed freshness and strength:

Thus I am concealed in things as fiery energy. They are ablaze through me, like the breath that ceaselessly enlivens the human being, or like the wind-tossed flame in a fire. All these things live in their essence, and there is no death in them, for I am life. I also am rationality, who holds the breath of the resonant word by which the whole of creation was created; and I have breathed life into everything, so that nothing by its nature may be mortal, for I am life.

Here is a Neoplatonic vision of the Godhead as a living energy and a resonant word, a *logos*, as in medieval interpretations of the Gospel of John, that is directed and nourished by the root of reason:

And I am life: not the life struck from stone, or blossoming from branches, or rooted in a man's fertility, but life in its fullness, for all living things have their roots in me. Reason is the root, through which the resonant word flourishes.

5. *Hildegard's music*

As early as 1148, in Odo of Soisson's letter, we learn of Hildegard's activities as a composer. Odo writes: 'They say that you are taken up in the heavenly places and see many things which you bring out in your writing; also, that you bring forth the melodies of a new song although you have not studied any of these things.' As with her literary work, so with her musical, it is stated quite clearly here by an acquaintance of Hildegard that she was accomplished as a musician although she had not studied music. The same claim is made in the autobiographical section of the *Life of Hildegard*: 'also I composed and sang songs with melodies in praise of God and the saints, again without any human instruction, although I had never learnt neums or singing.' Hildegard had not studied musical notation – the neums which indicate changes of pitch in medieval manuscripts – but it seems unlikely that a nun who took part every day in the offices of the liturgy had not learnt any kind of singing; presumably she means that she had not undertaken formal musical study.

The content of her music seems to confirm this. Hildegard's musical technique departs so radically from the norms of Gregorian plainchant that it suggests her claim is true: that she really had not undergone any study of the traditional forms. Instead, under the guidance of her inspiration, she was striking out on her own. As Odo says, this is truly 'a new song'; her melody often ranges over two octaves, frequently leaping suddenly from a low note to a high, varying its short phrases and motifs, and lingering on one syllable as it ascends and descends. Rooted as they are in the patterns of liturgical practices, her musical compositions nevertheless contain a surprising spontaneity and exuberance. Almost without exception, she chooses an appropriate scale or mode (E- and D-modes are favourites), appropriate, that is, to the theme of the text, and the uses of melisma on certain words can also underline the meaning, for instance on the word *'sonante'* ('sounding forth') at the end of the song *Cum processit*:[22]

O laudabilis Maria,
celo rutilante
et in laudibus sonante.

The significance of the word and its relevance to the theme of the song is best seen in the context of the whole piece:

When creation came forth from the finger of God
fashioned in God's image
created of mixed blood
along the exile-path of Adam's fall:
then the elements received
the joys of life.
O Mary, worthy of praise.
As heavens shine red
they sound forth your praise.

In this antiphon, or song composed to be sung by two choirs during the alternate chanting of verses of the psalms in the liturgy, a number of the characteristic themes of Hildegard's religious thought arise and blend. First there is the creation in the image of God, then the fall and exile of Adam, but at the same time the notion that the four elements out of which all matter is made somehow participate in the joys of life and the praise of the Virigin Mary. The final word of the Latin text, *'sonante'*, rhyming as it does with *'rutilante'* ('reddening'), seems to summarize these ideas. Accordingly, in performances of this antiphon, the word is drawn out in the melody for a relatively long period of time, particularly on the last syllable. In this way, the idea of 'the sacred sound through which all creation resounds' (of which Hildegard wrote to St Bernard) is embodied here in the external form of both the text and the music itself.

Altogether Hildegard wrote 77 songs, of which there are 43 antiphons, 18 responsories (i.e. songs which 'respond' to the readings in the church service), six sequences (longer pieces inserted into the liturgy of the mass), four hymns, three hymn-like songs, one kyrie, one alleluia, and one opera. The latter piece, known by its title *Ordo virtutum* ('Play of the Virtues'), is unique for its time in

being a kind of sung Morality play on the theme of the Soul as she is aided by the Virtues to return to the Church – despite the machinations of the devil, a character who cannot sing, but only make noise. The songs were collected together in 1158 in her work the *Symphonia harmoniae caelestium revelationum* ('Symphony of the Harmony of Celestial Revelations'), a title which is programmatic, and characteristic of Hildegard's views on music.

The first version of *The Play of the Virtues* was complete by 1151 and included as part of the final vision of the book *Scivias*. Here Hildegard summarized its theme (*Scivias* III, 13):

> Then I saw a bright layer of air in which I heard wonderfully diverse types of music within the aforementioned symbols: songs of praise for the joys of the citizens of heaven who persevere steadfastly on the way of truth, songs of lament for those who had to be called back to the praise of such joys, and songs of exhortation for the Virtues who urge each other to secure the salvation of the people struggling against the wiles of the devil. But the Virtues compel the faithful people finally to pass from their sins through penance to the heavenly heights.

The criticism in the letter written in 1148–50 by Tengswich, abbess and teacher of a community of canons at Andernach, that Hildegard's nuns wore costumes, including a kind of crown or tiara, is a possible allusion to a performance of the play. The descriptions of the garments of the blessed souls in *The Book of Life's Merits* may also have influenced Hildegard's conception of the play, along with her belief that consecrated nuns were in some way closer to the paradisal state, and therefore entitled to celebrate this in their style of dress. An additional possibility is that Hildegard intended her liturgical drama to be sung for the first time at the founding of the separate abbey at the Rupertsberg in 1150 or 1151. Finally, given its theme of the female soul recovering her place in the community of the Virtues, the play may also have served as an initiation ceremony for new nuns.

The notion of 'wonderfully diverse types of music' in the quotation above illustrates very well Hildegard's aims and purposes in making music to supplement the liturgy. As we saw in the sketch of her life, any disruption to that process could hardly even be

contemplated. During the row over the interdict in 1179, it is Hildegard's correspondence with the Mainz prelates that provides further clues to her wide-ranging thought on the issue of music. For Hildegard, the human soul is 'symphonic'; music is part of the profound nature of the spirit, by which a human being can recall the heavenly harmony and 'divine sweetness and praise by which with the angels, Adam was made jubilant in God before he fell'. And just as David called for every man and woman to praise the Lord in the Psalms (the basis of the liturgy, it should be remembered), so also the prophets of the Old Testament composed different types of songs and made different kinds of musical instruments. The forms and qualities of the instruments themselves, Hildegard asserts, can nurture the listeners as much as the meanings of the words. One remarkable passage in this letter reads like a meditation on the opening ideas of the song *Cum processit* (with which it should be compared – see above):

> Eager and wise men imitated the holy prophets, inventing human kinds of harmonized melody by their art, so that they could sing in the delight of their soul; and they adapted their singing to [the notation indicated by] the bending of the finger-joints, as it were recalling that Adam was formed by the finger of God, which is the Holy Spirit, and that in Adam's voice before he fell there was the sound of every harmony and the sweetness of the whole art of music. And if Adam had remained in that condition in which he was formed, human frailty could never endure the power and resonance of that voice.[23]

6. *The critical reception and history of Hildegard's writings*

Although the theological trilogy and the *Symphonia* are now generally considered to be the crowning achievements of Hildegard's career, the history of the reception of Hildegard's works tells a different story. Gradually, throughout the thirteenth century, Hildegard became known as a prophetic writer, and other aspects of her writing came to be neglected. The beginnings of this process can be seen in her own lifetime in the requests for prophetic advice she received, many of which survive among the extant correspondence. The quotation from John of Salisbury given above is another indicator of the awe felt at the time, even by a humanist

intellectual, for a man or woman with such a reputation. The text of the canonization protocol of 1233, which reports on interviews with witnesses who had known Hildegard in her lifetime, also suggests a strong general interest in prophecy, but it is the wide dissemination of another text which promoted such an interest. In about 1220, Gebeno of Eberbach completed his *Five Ages, or Mirror of Future Times* (often referred to by the title *Pentachronon*), in which he excerpted numerous long passages from Hildegard, his main criterion for selection being their prophetic nature. An example is Hildegard's consolatory letter to King Conrad, in which all trace of the recipient's name and rank, and the purpose of the letter, are excised. In general, Gebeno chose apocalyptic passages from the trilogy, or dire warnings from Hildegard's sermons and letters; suitably adapted, these extracts became the staple Hildegardian material for readers in the next two centuries. Thereafter, Hildegard remained little read until the late nineteenth century, although she was honoured in various churches as a saint, particularly in the Rhineland.

To indicate the popularity of Gebeno's work, it should be pointed out that while ten manuscripts survive for the *Scivias*, and four for *The Book of Divine Works* (this figure indicating that *Scivias* was by far the most widely known of Hildegard's theological works in her own lifetime), in the case of the *Pentachronon*, over a hundred manuscripts exist. As recent research has shown, it was in this form that Hildegard's writings reached the late medieval world, perhaps used for instance by William Langland, author of the Middle English poem *Piers Plowman*,[24] which challenged the clerical and political abuses of its day. Today tastes have changed, and Gebeno is unknown; there is still no printed version of the *Pentachronon*, which awaits a critical edition.[25]

A minor revival of interest in twelfth-century spirituality came with the new humanism of the fifteenth century,[26] a key figure in Germany being Johannes Trithemius (1462–1516), the Abbot of Sponheim (the home town of Jutta, Hildegard's guardian and abbess). With a strong local historical interest and a desire for

monastic reform, Trithemius mentions Hildegard in his Chronicle of Hirsau and Chronicle of Sponheim,[27] but he was also a student of arcane knowledge and magic,[28] and this perhaps explains his interest. In France, a similar humanist with an interest in mysticism was the Frenchman Jacques Lefèvre d'Etaples, author of *On Natural Magic* (1493) and the first to publish a printed edition of Hildegard's *Scivias* in 1513.

7. *The appeal of Hildegard*

In the course of time, the 'Sibyl of the Rhine' became a prophet, then a local saint of the Rhineland, and eventually a figure known elsewhere only in the recondite works of medievalists and cultural historians. But all this has changed. In the present day, she is well known primarily in two areas: firstly as a composer of music, of songs which as we have seen stand out from the regular Gregorian plainchant of the twelfth century; secondly, above all in present-day Germany, she has become an inspirational figurehead for proponents of herbal medicine and alternative therapies. These two areas of interest are very different: in the former Hildegard now belongs to the canon of musical history (though she has gained a wide and by no means exclusively musicological audience); in the latter area she remains a popular, as opposed to an academic, figure.

To a lesser extent also, Hildegard is known and admired today for her life story, for the biography of a woman who in an apparently misogynist period was able to assert herself as an influential and popular author. In Hildegard's biography, in her letters and prefaces, a colourful personality is seen and heard writing, teaching and even preaching to her contemporaries. Undoubtedly she is a warm character, despite her forbidding prophetic persona; she is at once convinced and convincing, self-effacing and yet a powerful voice for reform.

It is this voice that is also heard in her writings. Here Hildegard emerges as a dynamic force with a prophetic message to proclaim which was admired and listened to by her contemporaries and

immediate successors, as we have seen. In this respect, the Abbess of Rupertsberg is clearly a typical figure of her day who is gifted with the ability to express all the fears and the concerns, not to mention the pathologies, of the turbulent twelfth century. She does, however, have other voices, and it is these which seem to strike a chord with present-day readers.

As a religious thinker Hildegard is increasingly gaining in prestige. Orthodox in her beliefs, she offers a freshness in her theology and an expression of a spirituality which many today find attractive. Part of this attraction must lie in a distinctly feminine aspect to her thinking, an anthropology which places both man and woman as mutually dependent, and both equally reflecting the image of God. Her ideas too are linked to an ecology in which the human being is a part of nature, a microcosm of the wider workings of the universe. Part of her appeal must lie in her narrative gift, her ability to illustrate the concepts of religion, the mind and society with stories and mini-narratives that are still able to move or affect the present-day reader. When Love speaks with words such as 'I am the fiery life of divine substance, I blaze above the beauty of the fields, I shine in the waters, I burn in sun, moon, and stars', these have power to excite the interest of today's readers and sustain their interest. No doubt postmodern readers could find equally striking ideas in the work of Hildegard's contemporaries, such as Bernard Silvester, or even in the very different writings of a man like Hugh of St Victor. But Hugh remains known only to historians and philosophers, while Hildegard the woman, Hildegard the musician and Hildegard the the image-maker – all aspects of this one author – have captured our attention.

FURTHER READING

ABBREVIATIONS

CCCM	Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Medievalis
PL	Patrologia Latina

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CHRONOLOGY

THE AGE OF POPE GREGORY VII

1073 Pope Gregory VII attacks corruption in the Church (especially simony, i.e. the payment of money to secure jobs and positions within the Church); he insists on clerical celibacy, and asserts his sole right to appoint bishops

1074 Henry IV of Germany rejects Gregory's decrees as a threat to imperial power

1077 Henry submits and does penance to Gregory VII at Canossa

1084 Henry marches on Rome to make Wibert of Ravenna Pope Clement III

1085 Gregory VII dies in exile in Salerno

HILDEGARD'S EARLY YEARS

1096–9 First Crusade

1098 Beginnings of Cistercian monasticism

1098 Hildegard born at Bermersheim, Rheinhessen, south-west of Mainz

1106 Hildegard placed in the care of Jutta of Spanheim

1112(?) Jutta and Hildegard become recluses attached to Disibodenberg monastery

1112–15 The enclosure becomes a convent; Hildegard takes monastic vows

early i2th C Honorius ‘of Autun’, *Elucidarium* and *Imago mundi*

1115 The Cistercian St Bernard founds the Abbey of Clairvaux

1120s Hugh of St Victor at Paris, *Didascalicon* (Guide to the arts)

1140 Council of Sens; Bernard condemns Peter Abelard and Arnold of Brescia

1140s Beginnings of the Catharist religious movement in Germany Lamprecht, *Song of Alexander*

THE WORK ON *SCIVIAS*

1136 Death of Jutta; the nuns elect Hildegard as abbess of their community (at this point still attached to the monastery of Disibodenberg)

1141 Hildegard starts work on *Scivias*, with clerical assistance from the Disibodenberg monk Volmar

1143–8 Bernard Silvester, *Cosmographia*

1145 A former monk of Clairvaux becomes Pope Eugenius III

1146–7 Bernard of Clairvaux takes up the papal call to preach the Second Crusade (1147–9)

1146/7 Hildegard petitions Bernard of Clairvaux to support her writings

1147 Bernard Silvester’s *Cosmographia* approved by Eugenius III

1147/8 Hildegard’s writings approved by Eugenius and Bernard at the Synod of Trier

1148 Odo of Soissons, Master at Paris, writes to Hildegard

1148 Council of Rheims; Gilbert of Poitiers withdraws controversial statements

1148 Bernard attacks the Cluniac order

1148 The reformist Arnold of Brescia excommunicated at Synod of Cremona

1148–50 Abbess Tengswich of Andernach criticizes Hildegard

c. 1150 Hildegard moves her nuns to a new monastery at Rupertsberg, near Bingen

1151 Hildegard completes *Scivias*, with secretarial assistance from the monk Volmar and the nun Richardis of Stade

THE MIDDLE PERIOD (115I-8)

1151–2 Hildegard opposes the election of Richardis of Stade as abbess of Bassum in the diocese of Archbisho Hartwi of Bremen

1151–8 Hildegard writes songs, scientific and medical writings and various minor works

1150–65 Ælred of Rievaulx, *On Spiritual Friendship*

1152 Election of Conrad III's nephew Frederick (Barbarossa) as King of Germany

1153 Death of Bernard of Clairvaux

1154 Henry II becomes King of England

1154 Nicholas Breakspear becomes Pope Hadrian IV

c. 1154 Hildegard meets Frederick Barbarossa at Ingelsheim, near Rupertsberg

1155 Coronation of Frederick Barbarossa as Holy Roman Emperor

1155 Hildegard wins land ownership dispute with monks of Disibodenberg

1157 Diet of Besançon; conflict between Emperor and Pope over whether the imperial crown is a ‘benefice’ to be granted by the Pope

1157 Elisabeth of Schönau becomes abbess of her community of nuns

1158 Arnold Archbishop of Mainz confirms the financial agreement between Disibodenberg and Rupertsberg

THE PERIOD OF *THE BOOK OF LIFE'S MERITS*

1158 Hildegard begins *The Book of Life's Merits*

c.1158 Hildegard's first preaching tour; along the Main to Bamberg

1159 Election of Pope Alexander III. Beginning of eighteen-year schism between Emperor Barbarossa and the new pope. Barbarossa supports the antipope Victor IV and is excommunicated by Alexander

1160S Marie de France, *Lays*

1160 Hildegard's second preaching tour; to Trier and Lorraine

1161–3 Hildegard's third preaching tour; down the Rhine to Siegburg and Cologne

1163 Hildegard obtains deed of protection for the Rupertsberg from Barbarossa

1163 Hildegard completes *The Book of Life's Merits*

THE BOOK OF DIVINE WORKS

1163 Hildegard begins *The Book of Divine Works*; still assisted by Volmar

1164 Emperor Barbarossa elects a second antipope, Paschalis III; Hildegard protests

1165 Hildegard founds a second monastery at Eibingen

1165 Barbarossa installs Christian de Buch as Archbishop of Mainz, replacing Conrad, who flees the city

1160–70 Herrad of Landsberg, *Hortus deliciarum*

1167 Barbarossa invades Italy and takes Rome, but is eventually repulsed

1168 Hildegard writes a condemnatory letter to Barbarossa after his election of a third antipope, Callistus III

1170 Martyrdom of Thomas à Becket at Canterbury Cathedral

1170s Konrad, *Rolandslied*; Heinrich of Veldeke, *Eneit*; birth of Walther von der Vogelweide

1170 Hildegard, *Life of St Disibod*

1170–1 Hildegard's fourth preaching tour; through Swabia

1173 Volmar dies; secretarial assistance probably obtained now from Mainz

1173/4 Hildegard, *The Book of Divine Works*

LATER CAREER AND REPUTATION

1174 Gottfried arrives from Disibodenberg as secretary; begins *Life of Hildegard*

1175 Hildegard's correspondence with Guibert of Gembloux

1176 Gottfried dies

1177 Peace of Venice between Alexander III and Frederick Barbarossa

1177 Joachim of Fiore becomes abbot of Corazzo

1177 Guibert of Gembloux becomes Hildegard's secretary

1178–9 Hildegard's dispute with the diocese of Mainz

1179 Hildegard dies aged 82

1180–90 Theodorich of Echternach completes *Life of Hildegard*

1220 Gebeno of Eberbach excerpts Hildegard's writings in the *Pentachronon*

1233 Canonization protocol

1237 Demand for a revised version of the canonization protocol

1243 New protocol completed but canonization postponed indefinitely

from 15th C Hildegard's festival fixed as 17 September

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

Hildegard of Bingen was a prolific and wide-ranging author and composer, and the freshness of her work is admired today in many, very different circles. A selection from her writings cannot cover all aspects of this writer, and no doubt some favourite passages will be missed. There is a need, however, even in an anthology, to place such passages in a larger context. My main criterion, therefore, has been to take excerpts of moderate length, but not to omit any material from within the excerpt chosen. This means that some interesting pieces (well-known from other anthologies and studies) are not included since they occur within longer passages of limited interest or quality. The main exception to this principle is the series of short extracts from *Scivias* included in 16, where it seemed preferable to cover a range of Hildegard's teachings on the role of the Church.

The texts have been arranged into six sections by theme, to invite comparative study and to allow readers to range freely through the material according to their interests. The selection begins with Hildegard's letter to Bernard of 1146 and concludes with the witnesses to Hildegard's life in the Canonization Protocol of 1233–43. It is not necessary to follow this order in reading the book. Readers may find it useful to return to the rather densely written theological pieces in the first part after they have become more acquainted with Hildegard's characteristic ideas and idiosyncratic style from more accessible letters, songs and other writings in the later parts. Those interested in Hildegard's biography may prefer to begin with the extract from *The Life of Hildegard* and then move to the sections 'Struggles for Independence' and 'The Sibyl of the Rhine'. It will be noted that extracts from *Scivias* feature frequently in the selection. The intention is to reflect the degree of attention

which that work received during Hildegard's lifetime. In general, the broadly chronological order within each section is intended to draw attention to Hildegard's development as a writer and to place the texts within the historical situation in which she lived and worked. As well as notes on particular points, further explanations of the many names mentioned are provided in the Glossary at the end of this book.

The translations have been made from the texts of Hildegard's writings in the series Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Medievalis, published by Brepols in Turnhout, Belgium. In following these definitive editions, the selection has to some extent been restricted to Hildegard's major works, and certain important letters have been omitted. Where other editions have been used for texts not yet covered by the Corpus Christianorum series, these are indicated in the notes. The translations are intended to be readable, but not too readable, in the sense that Hildegard's vocabulary and imagery can sometimes be deliberately obscure and mysterious. To give a traditional feel to quotations from the Bible, I have drawn mostly on the Douay-Rheims and King James versions, sometimes slightly modernized, and occasionally adapted to fit Hildegard's text.

The work on these translations was carried out while holding a fellowship of the Centre for the Study of Christianity and Culture, at Regent's Park College, Oxford. Dr Oliver Davies and Dr Alan Kreider were particularly helpful and, in general, I would like to thank all my colleagues and friends for their support and advice during the writing of this book.

Mark Atherton

KNOW THE WAYS

1. Letter to Bernard of Clairvaux

Bernard of Clairvaux was an obvious person for Hildegard to appeal to for support as she pondered a radical change of course in her life and career. A widely known author and by then a venerable figure, Bernard was the abbot of the principal Cistercian monastery and head of the Cistercian order. He was also well placed to intervene on her behalf with a former monk of Clairvaux, Bernardo Pignatelli of Pisa, who had been elected Pope Eugenius III in the previous year. Bernard was an influential figure in the politics of Church and state, particularly in France and Germany, and at the time of her letter to him he had been preoccupied with preaching journeys in which he sought to gather support for the Second Crusade.

Hildegard to Bernard of Clairvaux, 1146 [Letter 1] [1]

Venerable Father Bernard, you are held wonderfully in high honour by the power of God. You are a terror to the unlawful foolishness of the world; you burn in the love of God's son; you are eager to win men for the banner of the Holy Cross to fight wars in the Christian army against the fury of the pagans.[2] Father, I ask you, by the living God, to attend to my questions.

I am very concerned by this vision which has appeared to me in the spirit of mystery, for I have never seen it with the external eyes of the flesh. I who am miserable and more than miserable in my womanly existence have seen great wonders since I was a child. And

my tongue could not express them, if God's Spirit did not teach me to believe.

Most gentle Father, you are secure; in your goodness please answer me, your unworthy servant, for since I was a child I have never felt secure, not for a single hour! Could you search your soul, in your piety and wisdom, and discover how you are instructed by the Holy Spirit, and pour consolation upon me, your servant, from your heart?

For in the text I know the inner meaning of the exposition of the Psalter and the Gospel and other books shown to me in this vision, which touches my heart and soul like a consuming fire, teaching me these profundities of exposition. But it does not teach me writings in the German tongue – these I do not know – and I only know how to read for the simple meaning, not for any textual analysis.[3] Give me an answer as to what you think, for I am a person ignorant of all teaching in external matters; I am taught inwardly, in my soul. Therefore I speak as one in doubt.

Hearing of your wisdom and piety I am comforted. Because there is so much divisiveness in people I have not dared to speak of these things to any other person except for one monk – whom I tested with regard to the integrity of his monastic life. I revealed all my secrets to him and he consoled me and convinced me that these are great secrets and things to be feared.

Father Bernard, I want you to reassure me, and then I will be certain! In a vision two years ago I saw you as a man able to stare at the sun without flinching, a courageous man. And I wept because I blush so much – because I am so timid! Good Father, through your kindness I have found a place in your soul, so that now, if you will, you can reveal to me through your word[4] whether you want me to say these things openly or whether I should keep quiet. For I have great trouble with this visionary gift about how much I should say of what I have seen and heard. And sometimes, because I keep quiet, I am laid low by the vision and confined to my sickbed, unable to raise myself up. So I am sad, I lament before you: I am unstable with the movement of the wooden beam of the wine-press

in my nature, the beam which grew at the prompting of the devil from the root in Adam (for which he was cast out as a wanderer in this exile world).[5] But now I raise myself up, I run to you, I speak to you. *You* are not unstable, you ease the pressure of the wooden beam, you gain the victory in your soul! And it is not only yourself alone: you raise up the whole world to salvation! You are the eagle staring at the sun![6]

And so I entreat you: by the brightness of the Father, by his wonderful Word, by the sweet humour of compunction, by the Spirit of Truth, by the sacred sound through which all creation resounds, by the Word from which all the world was created, by the height of the Father who through the sweet power of green vigour sent the Word to the Virgin's womb where it took on flesh like the honey in the honeycomb! May the sacred sound, the power of the Father, fall upon your heart and raise up your soul so that you are not passive and indifferent to the words of this correspondent, as long as you seek all things from God, from man or woman, or from the mystery, until you pass through the doorway in your soul and know these things in God.

Farewell. Be well in your soul, and strong in your certainty in God. Amen.[7]

2. The Action of the Will (from *Scivias* I, 4)

In a series of images based on her concept of 'greenness', this digression in the middle of Scivias 1, 4 *presents some of Hildegard's ideas on anthropology. Perhaps written before the letter to Bernard, it has been compared to writings by Hugh of St Victor and Honorius of Autun and reveals how widely read she must have been, especially as she did not base the passage on one particular identifiable source. Drawing on wide knowledge, Hildegard describes her understanding of such ideas as the relation of soul and body, human understanding and the action of the will.*

17. *How the soul reveals its capabilities according to the capabilities of the body*

The soul reveals her capabilities according to the capabilities of the body, so that in childhood she brings forth simplicity, in youth strength, and in the fullness of age, when all the veins of the human being are full, she brings forth her greatest strength in wisdom. In the same way a tree in its first growth brings forth tender shoots, goes on then to bear fruit and finally ripens that fruit to the fullness of utility. But afterwards in old age when a human being's bones and veins incline to weakness, then the soul reveals gentler strengths, as though tired of human knowledge. In the same way, at the onset of wintertime, the sap of the tree withdraws from the leaves and branches as the tree begins to incline towards old age.

18. *The human being contains three paths*

A human being contains three paths: namely, soul, body and senses. On these three paths, human life runs its course. The soul fills the body with life and brings forth the senses; for its part the body attracts the soul to it and opens the senses; in turn the senses touch the body and draw the soul to them. The soul provides the body with life like fire flooding the darkness with light; it has two major powers like two arms: the understanding and the will. Not that the soul has these limbs to move herself about; rather she reveals herself in these two powers like the sun manifesting itself in the splendour of its light. Therefore human being, you are not a bundle of veins; pay attention to the knowledge of the scriptures.[1]

19. *Human understanding*

Human understanding is connected to the soul like the arms to the body. For just as the arm is joined to the hand and the hand to the fingers, so also there is no doubt that understanding proceeds from the soul and activates the other powers of the soul, by which it knows and recognizes human actions. For over all the other powers of the soul it is understanding which distinguishes what is good from what is bad in human actions. Understanding is therefore a teacher through whom all things are known, for in this way he shakes out all things just as the wheat is separated from the stalks and husks; he examines what things are useful and what are useless, what things are lovable and what are hateful, what things belong to life and what to death.

Just as food without salt is bland, so also the other powers of the soul are weak and unknowing without it. Understanding is in the soul like the shoulders in the body, acting as the moving force behind the other powers of the soul, giving them strength like the shoulders give strength to the body. It is flexible, like the bend of the arm, discerning both the divine and the human in God. Thus human understanding works with true faith, for like the articulation of the fingers of the hand it can distinguish between many diverse

actions. It therefore operates differently from the other forces of the soul. Why is this?

20. *The will*

The will warms an action, the mind receives it, and thought bodies it forth. The understanding, however, discerns an action by the process of knowing good and evil just as the angels also have an understanding that loves good and hates evil. And just as the body has a heart, so too the soul has understanding, which exercises its power in one part of the soul just as the will does in another.

How does this happen? The will in fact has great power in the soul. How does this come about? The soul stands, so to speak, in the corner of the house, that is, in the firm support of the heart, like a man standing in the corner of a house in order to survey the whole house and supervise its running. He raises his right arm to give a sign and points out things useful to the house as he turns towards the east. The soul does likewise on the roadways of the whole body when she looks towards the rising of the sun. The soul uses the will, as it were like her right arm, as a firm support for the veins and the bones and the movement of the whole body, for the will directs every action, whether for good or ill.

21. *The parable of the fire and the bread*

The will is like a fire baking every action in an oven.[2] Bread is baked in order to feed people and strengthen them so that they can live. The will is the force behind the whole of the action. It grinds the action in a mill, it adds yeast and kneads it firmly and thus carefully prepares the action, like a loaf of bread which the will bakes to perfection in the heat of its zeal. In so doing it provides human beings with a better food than bread for the activities they do. For while food is taken into the human body and used up, the action of the will endures within the human being until the

separation of the soul from the body. And although the action will vary greatly in childhood, in youth, in maturity and in the declining years, nevertheless the will directs it stage by stage and brings it to perfection.

3. Redemption (*Scivias* II, 1)

In a version of the creation, the fall of Adam, and the redemption of humanity, Hildegard presents the story of her vision in a series of mysterious pictures. The work of God, for instance, is seen as a shining fire with a flame the 'colour of air, and the creation of the cosmos takes place when a dark sphere of air representing the basic matter of the world is brought into contact with the divine fire and illumined with light. Later, the fire merges with the brightness of the dawn on earth, the dawn being the light of the Incarnation, and the power of redemption centres on the appearance of a 'light-filled man'. In the original illustration to the scene, preserved in the Rupertsberg manuscript (see Introduction I. i), the 'light-filled man' is a reddish golden figure surrounded by large golden flames above his head and emerging from a red and golden circle, presumably the dawn, at the bottom of the picture.

Scivias, Part II, Vision 1

And I, a human being, neither ablaze with the strength of strong lions nor learned in their exhalations,[1] remaining in the fragility of the weaker rib, but filled with mystical inspiration, saw: a shining fire, unfathomable, inextinguishable, fully alive and existing full of life; with a flame the colour of the air, brightly burning in the gentle breeze, and as inseparable from the shining fire as a human being is inseparable from his inner organs. And I saw the shining flame glow white. And suddenly a dark sphere of air appeared, huge in size, upon which the shining flame struck many blows, and at each blow a spark flew up so that soon the circle of air was brought to completion, and heaven and earth shone forth in the fullness of perfection. The burning flame of heat moved towards a small clump of muddy earth lying on the circle of the ball of air. And it heated the clump of earth, turning it to flesh and blood, and breathing life into it so that it rose up as a living man. Once this was done, the shining fire with its flame burning bright in the gentle breeze offered the man a brilliant white flower that hung in the flame like a drop of dew on a stalk of grass. The man could smell its fragrance with his nose but not taste it with his mouth or touch it with his hands. And he turned away and fell into thick darkness from which he could not raise himself up. But the darkness grew and spread further and further across the air. Then three large stars appeared in the darkness, combining in their brightness, and after them many others, small and large, shining in high splendour. Finally a great star appeared, radiating marvellous clarity and directing its splendour towards the aforesaid flame. But on the earth a brightness like the dawn appeared, merging with the flame in a marvellous manner but nevertheless not becoming separated from the shining fire. And in this way, in the brightness of the dawn, a great will was kindled.

But when I tried to consider more closely the kindling of that will, I was opposed by a secret seal on the vision,[2] and I heard a

voice speak to me from on high: ‘Of this mystery you may not see any more than is granted you through the miracle of belief.’

And I saw a light-filled man emerge[3] from the aforesaid dawn and pour his brightness over the aforementioned darkness; it repulsed him; he turned blood-red and pallid, but struck back against the darkness with such force that the man who was lying in the darkness became visible and resplendent through this contact, and standing up, he came forth out of the darkness. And thus the light-filled man, who had emerged from the dawn, appeared in greater splendour than any human tongue can express, and he proceeded to the utmost heights of immeasurable glory, where he shone out wondrously in the fullness of great fragrance and fruitfulness.

And I heard a voice speaking to me from the living fire I have mentioned: Insignificant earthly creature! Though as a woman you are uneducated[4] in any doctrine of fleshly teachers in order to read writings with the understanding of the philosophers, nevertheless you are touched by my light, which touches your inner being with fire like the burning sun. Shout and tell! And write down these my mysteries which you see and hear in the mystical vision! Do not be afraid, but tell the mysteries as you understand them in the spirit, as I speak them through you. May they be ashamed who should be showing righteousness to my people! Through the fickleness[5] of their own morals, they refuse to proclaim openly the justice which they know for themselves! They have no will to cease from their evil desires, which stick to them as though they were their teachers, causing them to run away from the face of the Lord, so that they are ashamed to speak the truth. Therefore, paltry soul, instructed as you are in your inner being by mystical inspiration, and although you are trampled by the male form because of Eve’s transgression, speak nevertheless of the fiery work of salvation which this most certain vision reveals to you!

The living God, who created all things through his Word, led the miserable human being who had fallen into darkness back to the salvation of faith through the Word incarnate. What does this mean?

1. *The omnipotence of God*

The ‘shining fire’ which you see[6] represents the omnipotent living God, whose light-filled brightness is never obscured by any evil. He remains ‘unfathomable’, because he cannot be divided by any divisions, and he is without beginning or end, not to be comprehended by any glimmer of creaturely knowledge. And he remains ‘inextinguishable’, for he is that plenitude which never reaches an end, and he is ‘fully alive’, since nothing can be completely hidden that he does not know about, and ‘existing full of life’, for everything that is alive draws its life from him, as Job declares and speaks by my inspiration:

2. *The words of Job*

‘Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the Lord hath wrought this? In whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind.’[7]

What does this mean? No creature can be so stupid by nature that it is ignorant of all the causes and relationships which make up its fruitfulness and fertility.[8] And how is this? The sky has light, the light air, the air birds; the earth nourishes the greenness, the greenness the fruit, the fruit the animals; all testify that they were established by a mighty hand – the great power of the Lord of all, who through the force of his strength has worked all things so that none may fail in their usefulness. All creatures live and move in the omnipotence of the Creator, not only those who seek the earth and earthly things as do cattle, which do not have rationality by the inspiration of God, but also those who inhabit human flesh in which they partake of rationality, power of discernment, and wisdom.

How is this? The soul encircles earthly matters, at work through the many changes that fleshly customs demand of it. But the spirit raises itself up in two ways: on the one hand by heaving sighs, groanings and desires for God,[9] on the other by seeking as it were through commands to exercise sovereignty, influence and autonomy

in various areas, because through reason the spirit has the power of discernment. Therefore, also, the human being contains the likeness of heaven and earth within her.[10] How does this come about? The human creature contains a circle in which there appear the qualities of discernment, breath of life and rationality, just as in the heavens there are stars, air and birds. Likewise, the human creature contains a receptacle in which there appear the moisture of the humours, germination and parturition, just as on earth there is greenness, fruitfulness and animals. What does this mean? Human creature! You are a wholeness in every created thing and yet you forget your creator! All things subject to you obey their creator as they were made to. But only *you* desire to transgress his commandments?

3. *Before and after the Incarnation the Word remains indivisibly and eternally with the Father*

You see in your vision 'the fire having a flame the colour of the air, brightly burning in the gentle breeze, and as inseparable from the shining fire as a human being is inseparable from his inner organs'. This is the infinite Word, which is in the Father before time, before the working of creation. In the glow of love, this Word was to become incarnate, in the course of time, miraculously and without stain or weight of sin, through the pure green vigour[11] of the Holy Spirit in the dawn of blessed maidenhood. And before his assumption of flesh the Word was indivisible in the Father and remained inseparable in him after his assumption of human nature. For as a human being cannot exist without the breath of air in his inner organs, in the same way, the unique Word cannot be separated in any way from the Father.

4. *Why the Son of God is called the Word*

And why is he called the Word? For the following reason. Through the speaking of the localized word,[12] which is impermanent, in the

dust of humanity, wise and prudent people understand the commands of a ruler and the reason for his commands.[13] Similarly also, through the utterance of the unlocalized Word, which is permanent in the inextinguishable life that lives through eternity, the strength of the Father is understood by the various creatures of the world who sense and recognize it as the origin of their created state. Likewise, just as the capacity and the glory of the human being are known by the functioning word, so the sanctity and the goodness of the Father shine through the perfectly filled Word.[14]

5. *How the whole of creation was roused by God's Word and how humanity came back to life through salvation*

When you see the 'shining flame glow white', it means that God's Word revealed its power as it were by catching fire: the whole of creation was roused by him and grew incandescent when the Word became incarnate in the dawn and brilliance of maidenhood, so that from the Word all the virtues and powers flowed in the knowledge of God when humanity came back to life in the salvation of souls.

6. *How God's unknowable power fashioned the world and brought forth the various species*

'And suddenly a dark sphere of air appeared, huge in size.' This is the basic material of creation, still in the darkness of imperfection and not yet illuminated or filled with creatures. This material is a 'sphere' because it is within God's unknowable power, since his divinity is never absent.[15] It rises in God's great power and in the winking of an eye is transported to the heights of heavenly will.

'The shining flame struck many blows upon it,' as a blacksmith does, 'and at each blow a spark flew up so that soon the sphere of air was brought to completion, and heaven and earth shone forth in the fullness of perfection.' The meaning is this. The Word from on high, surpassing the whole of creation, revealed the force of his

strength by creating creatures, who pay him their allegiance. From the basic material he brought forth the diverse species of creatures gleaming in the wonder of their birth and awakening – like a smith skilfully fashioning his artefacts out of bronze – until created things shone resplendent in the beauty of fullness. Each was ranked into higher and lower orders, all having the attractiveness and stability of perfect workmanship and shining on each other from above and from below.

7. *After the creation of the other creatures the man was created from the clay of the earth*

'The burning flame of heat moved towards a small clump of muddy earth lying on the bottom of the circle of air.' After creating the other creatures, in the strong will of the Father and in the love of heavenly sweetness, the Word of God contemplated the soft, crumbly material – the weak frailty of human nature – out of which both good and evil humans would be created. This was detained still in the depths of unconsciousness and heaviness and not yet awakened by the rousing breath of life.

'And it heated the clump of earth, turning it to flesh and blood.'[16] This means that the flame through green vigour pours heat into the clump of earth, because earth is the material out of which human flesh is made, nourishing it with its moisture like a mother suckling a child.[17]

'And breathing life into it so that it rose up as a living man.' This means that the flame awakens him with heavenly power and marvellously brings forth a rational human being made up of body and soul.[18]

8. *How Adam, having received the gentle commandment of clear obedience, did not accept it, on the advice of the devil*

‘Once this was done, the shining fire with its flame burning bright in the gentle breeze offered the man a brilliant white flower that hung in the flame like a drop of dew on a stalk of grass.’ When the Father, who is brightest Light, had created Adam, he entrusted him, through the Word in the Holy Spirit, with the gentle commandment of clear obedience, which clings to the Word in the moist green vigour of fruitfulness; for by that same Word a most pleasing sacred moisture streams like dew from the Father in the Holy Spirit, producing great and plentiful fruit, just as pure dew falling on grass brings it most fittingly to germination.

‘The man could smell its fragrance with his nose but not taste it with his mouth or touch it with his hands.’ The meaning is this. With his nose, as it were, he inhaled the precepts of the law with the knowledge of wisdom; with his mouth, however, he was unable to take in fully the power of the law’s intimate embrace; and with the work of his hands he could not perfect the law in the fullness of blessedness.

‘And he turned away and fell into thick darkness from which he could not raise himself up.’ The reason is that following the advice of the devil he turned his back on the divine command and fell into the jaws of death, because he did not seek God either in faith or works. Thus burdened by his sins, he was unable to rise up to true knowledge, until the coming of him who obeyed his Father fully without sin.

‘But the darkness grew and spread further and further across the air.’ The power of death in the world was continually increased by the spread of the vices, and the consciousness of humanity became all the more entwined in the diversity of the many vices, which broke out in the horror of putrid sins.

9. *How Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the other prophets broke through the darkness of the world with their prophecies*

‘But then three large stars appeared in the darkness, combining in their brightness, and after them many others, small and large, shining in high splendour.’ In these three large stars there is a figure of the heavenly Trinity; they represent namely Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who embrace each other both in their faithful works and also in their family relationship,[19] and with their prefigurements they break through the darkness of the world. They are followed by many other prophets, both minor and important, radiating the light of many marvellous miracles.

10. *How, shining in wonders, the principal prophet John prefigured the Son*

‘Finally a great star appeared, radiating marvellous clarity and directing its splendour towards the aforesaid flame.’ This is the principal prophet John the Baptist, shining in miracles through his most faithful bright works, and thus prefiguring the true Word, that is, the true Son of God, for John did not yield to evil but resolutely and firmly rejected it with his works of justice.

11. *With the incarnation of the Word, the great and ancient plan became visible*

‘But on the earth a brightness like the dawn appeared, merging with the flame in a marvellous manner but nevertheless not becoming separated from the shining fire.’ This means that God planted a great splendour of red light in that place of growth; he sent his Word into it full of desire, and he did not separate himself from his Word, but gave it as a bounteous fruit and brought forth from it a great fountain, so that every faithful throat that drank from it would no longer be dry with thirst.

‘And in this way, in the brightness of the dawn, a great will was kindled.’ Thus in the brightness of red shining light the green force

of the great plan of old was seen, so that all the preceding legions marvelled over this in happiness and light.

12. *The human creature should not investigate the secrets of God any more than he wishes to reveal them*

You, human creature! In the way of humans, you desire to know more about this exalted plan, but a seal of secrecy will be imposed on you; for you are not permitted to investigate the secrets of God more than the divine majesty wishes to reveal, because of his love for believers.

13. *The Son of God, born into the world, defeated the devil by his death and led his chosen people to their inheritance*

'And I saw a light-filled man emerge from the aforesaid dawn and pour his brightness over the aforementioned darkness; it repulsed him; he turned blood-red and pallid, but struck back against the darkness with such force that the man who was lying in the darkness became visible and resplendent through this contact, and standing up, he came forth out of the darkness.' This signifies God's Word, incarnate inviolately in the glory of unstained maidenhood, and born without pain, but nevertheless not separated from the Father. How did this happen? When the Son of God was born into the World through the Mother, he appeared in heaven in the Father; therefore the angels immediately trembled and sang sweet praises in their joy. He lived in the world without stain of sin and sent forth into the darkness of unbelief a light-filled blessing of doctrine and salvation; but he was rejected by an unbelieving people and led away to suffer; he shed his beautiful blood and tasted in his body the darkness of death. By this means he overcame the devil, led forth his elect from hell in which they had been thrown down and confined, and brought them back, through his mercy and the touch of his redemption, to the inheritance which they had lost in Adam.

And when they arrived in their inheritance, drums and harps sounded and songs of music in countless beautiful variations, for the human being who had been lying in a lost state was now in a blessed state. Freed by heavenly virtue, he had escaped death. As I said through my servant Hosea:

14. *The words of Hosea on the same matter*

'The iniquity of Ephraim is bound up; his sin is hid. The sorrows of a travailing woman shall come upon him: he is an unwise son; for he will not stand in the face of the misery of his children. I will deliver them from the hand of death. I will be your death, O death, I will be your destruction, O underworld.'[20]

What does this mean? The evil iniquity of the devil is bound in the weight of bondage, for he has not earned release by the zeal of God, since he has never looked upon God in righteous knowledge in the way that others look upon him who fear him in faith. The devil always raises himself up against God saying 'I am a god' and deceiving himself about the blessed one of the Lord. Because of him he opposes all who are Christians. Therefore his malice is hidden to such an extent that no medicine is suitable to cover his sin with salvation, the sin which he so cruelly commits in the impurity of his pride. Therefore he will be in the bitterness of pain, like a woman giving birth, desperately worried about whether she will be able to survive the opening of her womb. This unhappiness will remain hanging over him; he will be deserted by beatitude, for the wisdom of children will flee from him, because he does not come to himself, unlike the one who came to himself and moved from iniquity back to his father.[21]

For these reasons he will never stand faithful and contrite like the children of salvation who through the heavenly Son overcame that death-bringing, hard-hearted iniquity. The same venomous serpent caused this iniquity to come forth when he tempted the first man with a cunning which he did not know about. But because these children despise the venom of that impure temptation and look to

their salvation, I will free them from the servitude of idols. Those deceived by idols are in the power of perdition, and through idols the unbelievers forsake the honour of their Creator, entangling themselves in the traps of the devil and carrying out his works according to his will.

And therefore I will redeem from the punishment of hell the souls of those who love me and worship me, that is, the souls of the saints and the souls of the just; for no one can be saved from the bonds of the devil, in which he or she is tied up by bitter death because of their breaking of God's commandments, except by the redemption of the one who will redeem his chosen people with his own blood. I will utterly destroy you, death, for I will take from you those by whom you think you can live, so that you will be called a useless corpse! You will be thrown down in your greatest strength, just as the body which is vacated by the soul is cast down to complete destruction. For the fountain of the water of life will overwhelm you when the happy souls are mercifully awakened to heavenly blessedness by the new man, who will not be the companion of venomous deception. Therefore, O underworld, I will be the bite of your overturning, when, in my power and great strength, I take from you the spoils which you so fraudulently seized! Thus justly deprived, you will never again appear whole and filled with riches. Hideous, prostrate, covered in wounds, you will bear your disgrace in perpetuity!

15. *The body of the Son of God, lying in the tomb for three days, rose again and showed humanity the way of truth from death to life*

But you see that 'the light-filled man, who had emerged from the dawn, appeared in greater splendour than any human tongue can express'. This shows that the Father's glory touched the most noble body of the Son of God, born of the sweet Virgin, lying in the tomb for three days, in order to confirm that there are three persons in one Godhead. Thus he received back the Spirit and rose again in

brightest immortality in such a way that no human imagination or words can explain. And the Father presented him with his open wounds to the heavenly choirs, saying: 'This is my beloved Son,[22] whom I sent to die for the people.' Then a joy unknowable to the human mind rose up among them, for the sinful oblivion in which God was not known was now overcome, so that human reason,[23] which had been knocked down by the wiles of the devil, had now risen up to the knowledge of God. And through a great blessing the way of truth was now revealed to humankind, who had been led out of death into life.

16. *How the Son of God rose from death and appeared often to his disciples to strengthen them*

Just as the children of Israel were freed from Egypt, crossing the desert in forty years and reaching a land of milk and honey, so the Son of God rose from the dead and graciously appeared for forty days to his disciples and the holy women, who mourned for him and desired with great longing to see him. He did this to strengthen them so that they would not doubt by saying: 'We have not seen him and so we cannot believe that he is our salvation.' But he showed himself to them on many occasions to strengthen them so that they would not fall.

17. *By his ascension to the Father the Son of God showered his bride with diverse adornments*

The fact that he then 'proceeded to the utmost heights of immeasurable glory, where he shone out wondrously in the fullness of great fragrance and fruitfulness' has the following interpretation. The Son of God ascends to the Father, who alone with the Son and the Holy Spirit is the utmost excellent height of inexpressible joy and bliss. There the Son appears gloriously to the faithful in the abundance of bright sanctity and blessedness, and they believe in

the purity and simplicity of their hearts that he is true God and man. Then the new bride of the lamb is showered with diverse adornments; she will be decorated with every kind of virtue for the great battle which will be fought by all the faithful against the venomous serpent.

May whoever sees with watchful eyes or hears with echoing ears offer a kiss and embrace to these my mystical words, which are uttered by me, the Living One.

4. Letter to Odo of Soissons

This letter is a classic example of Hildegard's willingness and ability, through the 'living light' as she put it, to participate in the scholastic controversies of her day. Odo, a theologian and master at Paris, heard of Hildegard at the Synod of Trier (1147–8) and wrote to ask her opinion of Gilbert Porreta's statements on the Trinity, which were discussed at the Council of Rheims in 1148 (for Odo's letter, see 32 below). In his thinking, Gilbert had sought to make a real distinction between God and the godhead. He termed the latter the form of God' i.e. the nature or being of God, in which the Trinity is one. But whatever has being through this form is not one, he thought, but three unities. Gilbert therefore saw a real difference between, on the one hand, the three divine Persons, and, on the other hand, divine being itself. Thus it seemed to him necessary to deny that the Father and paternity had the same identity, a position which placed him (apparently unwillingly) in opposition to Church doctrine. He eventually withdrew these statements after the discussions at Rheims.[1]

Hildegard to Odo of Soissons, 1148 [Letter 40R]

I, a mere woman, tell you this in the smoke of aromatic spices on the high mountain. The sun shines down its light and illuminates the many unpleasant matters in various places.

You, Master Odo, in your teaching, have made many channels into the Scriptures, which you then direct to others, both great and small, whereas I only tremble at my humble status.

Listen now: a king sat on his throne, high pillars before him splendidly adorned and set on pediments of ivory. They showed the king's vestments in great honour everywhere. Then the king chose

to lift a small feather from the ground, and he commanded it to fly just as the king himself wished. But a feather does not fly of its own accord; it is borne up by the air. So too I am not imbued with human doctrine or strong powers. Nor do I desire good bodily health. Rather, I depend entirely on God's help.

And I say to you: I heard from a certain man fluent in doctrine who asked me whether or not the paternity of the high Father and the divinity of God were identical with God. And he asked me, a fainthearted woman, to look carefully to the true Light to find out about these things. And I looked and learned, not by my own inquiries but by looking into the true Light, that God is in fact both paternity and divinity, for we human beings are not capable of learning about God in the same way that we learn about the humanity of other human beings or about the quality of their actions.

The Living Light therefore speaks with the secret word of Wisdom: God is full and whole and beyond the beginning of time, and therefore he cannot be divided or analysed by words as a human being can. God is a whole and nothing other than a whole, to which nothing can be added and from which nothing can be taken away. For he-who-is is both paternity and divinity, since it is said 'I am who I am'.[2] And he-who-is is fullness itself. How is this to be understood? By his activity, creativity and perfection.

Whoever says that God is not paternity and divinity is naming a middle point without a circle. And whoever insists on having a middle point without a circle denies the one who is eternal. And whoever denies that God is both paternity and divinity denies God, for he implies that there is a kind of emptiness in God, which is not the case. But God is fullness and whatever is in God is God. God cannot be shaken or passed through a sieve by human thinking, for there isn't anything in God that is not God. And since creation has a beginning, human reasoning has to find God through names and concepts, for human reasoning itself is by its nature full of names and concepts.

Now, O man, listen again to the poor little form of a woman speaking to you in the Spirit: God wants you to make straight your paths and to be subject to him so that you may be a living rock in the cornerstone. In this way you will not be separated from the tree of life.

5. The Trinity (*Scivias* II, 2)

The illustration accompanying this vision of the Trinity in the Rupertsberg codex shows a series of three concentric coloured circles with a large figure of a man standing in the middle. The subtlety with which Hildegard uses imagery to explain the mysteries of the Trinity should be compared with her letter to Odo of Soissons (4) on the same subject.

Scivias, Part II, vision 2

Then I saw an extremely bright light and in the light the figure of a man the colour of sapphire, and it was all burning in a delightful red fire. And the bright light flooded through all the red fire, and the red fire through all the bright light, and the bright light and the red fire shone together through the whole figure of the man so that they were one light in one strength and power. And again I heard the living light speaking to me.

1. *The sense of God's mystery*

This is the sense of God's mystery: in order that we might clearly perceive and understand what his fullness is, the origin of which has never been seen and in which there is never any lack of the powerful strength that established all the streams of spiritual force. For if God were ever to be empty of his own greenness and power, what would become of his works? They would of course be in vain. Therefore he who is the maker is seen in the fullness of his works.

2. *The three persons*

Therefore you see 'an extremely bright light', which signifies the Father, who is without the stains of illusion, failure or deceit. And in the light is 'the figure of a man the colour of sapphire', which represents the Son, who is without the stains of hard-heartedness,[1] envy or evil, and who before all time, according to his divinity, was begotten of the Father, but afterwards, in time, according to his humanity, became incarnate in the world. And 'it was all burning in a delightful red fire'; this is the fire without the stains of aridity, mortality or darkness, which represents the Holy Spirit, by whom the Only Begotten of the Father was conceived in the flesh, born in time of the Virgin and poured out his light, truth and brightness over all the world.

‘And the bright light flooded through all the red fire, and the red fire through all the bright light, and the bright light and the red fire shone together through the whole figure of the man so that they were one light in one strength and power.’ This means that the Father, who is supremely just uniformity,[2] is not without the Son or the Holy Spirit; and that the Holy Spirit, who inflames the hearts of the faithful, is not without the Father or the Son; and that the Son, who is the fullness of fruitfulness, is not without the Father or the Spirit; for they are inseparable in the majesty of divinity, because the Father is not without the Son, nor the Son without the Father, nor the Father or the Son without the Holy Spirit, nor the Spirit without them; so these three persons exist as one God in one integral divinity and majesty, and the unity of divinity thrives inseparable in the three persons, because divinity cannot be separated, since it remains always unchanged without any mutability. But the Father is revealed through the Son, the Son through the beginning of created things, and the Holy Spirit through the incarnate Son. How is this? It is the Father who before time engendered the Son; it is the Son through whom all things were created by the Father at the beginning of creation; and it is the Holy Spirit who appeared in the form of a dove at the baptism of the Son of God towards the end of all time.[3]

3. *May the human race never cease to call fervently upon the one God in three persons*

Therefore may the human race never cease to call upon me the one God in three persons, for I have revealed this to human beings in order that they might blaze all the more fiercely in love of me, since I sent my Son into the world through my love for them, just as John, my loved one,[4] witnesses, saying:

4. *John on the love of God*

‘The love of God was disclosed to us in this: that he sent his only begotten Son into the world that we may live through him. His love is in this, not as we loved God but that he first loved us and sent his Son as a propitiation for our sins.’[5] What does this mean? Because God loved us another salvation arose different from the one we had at our first origins, when we were the heirs of innocence and sanctity. For the heavenly Father revealed his love to us in our danger of punishment; for through his heavenly power he sent his Word alone and full of sanctity into the darkness of the world. And there the Word perfected all good things and through his mildness led us back to life. He led us back when we had been rejected for the impurity of our wrongdoing and were unable to return to the sanctity we had lost. What does this mean? It means that God’s loving maternal embrace came to us through the fountain of life; his love nourished us for life; and in times of danger his love is our help, a deep and gentle love leading to penitence. How is this?

God has mercifully remembered his great work and his most precious pearl – the human being[6] – whom he fashioned from the soil of the earth and inspired with the breath of life. How did he do this? He drew us to life through penitence, which never fails in its effectiveness, because the cunning serpent deceived us through his proud persuasions; but God cast him down through the penitence which reveals humility, a humility which the devil did not know or practise, for he did not know how to raise himself up to the path of righteousness.

Therefore the salvation of love did not originate in us, for we neither knew nor were able to love God for our salvation; rather, it came from our Creator and Lord, who loved his people so much that he sent his Son for our salvation, as leader and Saviour of the faithful, who washed all our wounds. Thus also he shed that sweet balm from which all the good things of our salvation flow.

Therefore, O human creature, you too should know that God is not affected by any adverse mutability, for the Father is the Father, the Son is the Son, the Holy Spirit is the Holy Spirit; these three

persons exist indivisibly in the unity of the godhead. How does this come about?

5. *The three powers of a stone*

There are three powers in a stone and three in a flame and three in a word. In a stone there is moist greenness, palpable strength and red-burning fire.[7] It has moist greenness so that it will not fall apart and disintegrate, and palpable strength so that it can provide habitation and defence, and red-burning fire so that it can be warmed and strengthened in its durability. Its moist greenness signifies the Father, who will never dry out or reach a limit to his power; its palpable strength signifies the Son, since he was born of the Virgin and could be touched and grasped; its red-burning fire signifies the Spirit, who is the fire and illumination of the hearts of the faithful. What does this all mean?

Imagine someone who comes into contact too often with the moisture and greenness of a stone and so weakens and falls ill;[8] in the same way a foolhardy person who tries – in the instability of their thoughts – to look upon God will perish in their faith. Imagine a people taking the palpable strength of stones to build their habitations and protect themselves against their enemies; in the same way the Son of God, who is the true cornerstone, is the habitation of the faithful people, protecting them against evil spirits. And imagine also the red fire, burning bright and lighting up the darkness; in the same way the Holy Spirit puts unbelief to flight, removing all the rust of iniquity.

Just as the three powers are contained within the one stone, so the true Trinity is contained within the true Unity.

6. *The three powers of a flame*

And just as there are three powers in the glowing heat of a flame, so the one God is in three persons. How is this? The flame consists of

splendid brightness, purple vigour and fiery glow. It has a splendid brightness so that it can shine its light, a purple vigour so that it can maintain its existence, and a fiery glow so that it can burn. Consider the Father in the splendid brightness, for he sends out his brightness to the faithful through the goodness of his fatherhood; and in the purple vigour held within the flame and containing its strength, consider the Son, who assumed a body from the Virgin in which the godhead declared its marvels; and in the fiery glow perceive the Holy Spirit, who pours his fire over the minds of believers. But the flame will not be seen if there is no splendid brightness, or purple vigour, or fiery glow; in the same way, God is not worthily honoured in any place where neither the Father, Son, nor Holy Spirit is venerated.

Therefore just as three powers are discerned in the one flame, so three persons are to be understood in the unity of the godhead.

7. *The three components of the human word*

Three components may be noted in the human word, just as the Trinity may be considered in the unity of the Godhead. How is this to be done? A word is composed of sound, force and breath.[9] A word has sound in order to be heard, force in order to be understood, and breath in order to be completed. In the sound of the word consider the Father, who expresses all things by his ineffable power; in the force of the word consider the Son, marvellously engendered of the Father; in the breath of the word consider the Holy Spirit, who burns gently within them. But if the sound is not heard, then the force does not operate and the breath is not raised; hence the word is not understood; because the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not to be divided, for they function as one unanimous activity.

Therefore just as there are the three components of the word so also the heavenly Trinity is in one heavenly unity. And just as no moist greenness can exist or function in the stone without the palpable strength or the red-burning flame, and no palpable strength without the moist greenness or burning flame, and no burning flame

without moist greenness or palpable strength; and just as no splendid brightness can exist or function in the flame without the purple vigour or the fiery glow, and no purple vigour without the splendid brightness or the fiery glow, and no fiery glow without the splendid brightness or purple vigour; and just as no sound can exist or function in the word without force or breath, and no force without the sound or the breath, and no breath without the sound or the force, for they act indivisibly in unison; so also the three persons of the Trinity exist inseparably in the majesty of the Godhead and cannot be divided from each other.

Human creature, understand that the one God is in three persons! But you imagine in the foolishness of your mind that God is so powerless that it is impossible for him truly to exist in three persons, but only barely to exist in one! What are you thinking? God is truly God in three persons, the first and the last.[10]

8. *The unity of being*

But the Father is not without the Son, nor the Son without the Father, nor the Father without the Son and the Holy Spirit; nor is the Holy Spirit without them, because the three persons are inseparable in the unity of divinity. How is this possible? The word sounds from the mouth of a human being, but the mouth does not make a sound without the word, and the word itself does not sound without life. And where is the word located? In the human being. And where does the word come from? Again, from the human being. And how does this happen? Through a living human being. Thus the Son is in the Father, and he is sent by the Father to this dark earth for the salvation of humankind and conceived by the Virgin through the Holy Spirit. He is the only begotten Son in the deity and the only begotten Son in the virginity; and he is both the only Son of the Father and the only Son of the Mother; for just as the Father engendered him alone outside time, so the Mother engendered him alone inside time, and she remained a virgin after the birth.

Therefore, O human creature, understand that there is one God in three persons, who created you in the strength of his divinity and who redeemed you from your lost state. Do not forget your Creator, as Solomon urges you, and as it is written:

9. *The words of Solomon*

‘Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the time of affliction comes and before the years approach of which you will say: I do not like them.’[11]

What does this signify? Through your sense of reason, remember the one who created you when as it were in the days of your false confidence you consider it possible for you to proceed according to your desires: to raise yourself to the heights or plunge into the depths, to stand in prosperity or to fall in tribulation. For the sense of life[12] which is within you is striving continuously towards perfection until that time when it will be fulfilled. How is this to be understood? The child advances from her first beginnings up to full adult stature and then remains in a state of perfection, abandoning that boisterousness which is mere foolish behaviour; but only with great trouble does she now provide carefully for those things in her life which need considering but which she used to neglect in the foolishness of her childhood. May the faithful person behave like this! May she abandon the behaviour of childhood and ascend to the fullness of the virtues! May she persevere in their strength, rejecting the arrogant desire which simmers in the foolishness of the vices! In her trials and tribulations may she meditate on what is beneficial to her, just as earlier she had inclined childishly to the behaviour of childhood![13]

Therefore, O human creature, embrace your God thus in the light of your vigour, before the hour arrives for the purgation of your deeds, when all things will be revealed and nothing will remain unconsidered. Then also all the times will flow past and will lack nothing of their fullness. In your sense of humanity you will grumble, saying: ‘I do not like these changeable things; I do not

understand whether they will lead to prosperity or disaster'; for the human mind is always in doubt, because when it does good things it worries about whether they are pleasing to God; and when it does evil things it fears for the salvation of redemption.

May whoever sees with watchful eyes or hears with echoing ears offer a kiss and embrace to these my mystical words, which are uttered by me, the Living One.

6. Letter to Pope Eugenius III

In the first of several letters to Pope Eugenius III, written shortly after the Synod of Trier (1147–8) and before the completion of Scivias *(1151), Hildegard alludes to the pope's visit to Trier and expresses her concern that he will continue to lend his support for the book despite the opposition of many wise men of earthly inclination'.*

Hildegard to Pope Eugenius III, 1148 [Letter 2]

Gentle Father, though a small and insignificant figure, I write to you now, in a true vision by mystical inspiration, on all that God wishes me to teach.

Resplendent Father, you came to our land in your official capacity, as God willed it, and you saw something of the true visions which the Living Light has taught me, and you heard them in the embrace of your heart. Now that a part of this writing is finished, still the same Light has not left me but burns in my soul as I have had it since childhood. Therefore I send you now this letter in the true admonition of God. And my soul desires that the Light from the Light will shine within you and pour over your eyes and awaken your spirit to these writings so that your soul may be crowned by them, as God so wishes. But many wise men of earthly inclination have rejected these things, in the inconstancy of their hearts, because they come from this poor female figure who was formed in the rib and not taught by the philosophers.

Father of pilgrims, hear the voice of Him who is. A strong king sat in his hall, high pillars before him covered in gold bands and adorned with pearls and precious stones. And the king chose to touch a tiny feather, so that it soared up marvellously, and a strong

wind bore it up so that it did not fall. Again he speaks to you – he who is the Living Light shining in the heavens and in the abyss, not hidden or concealed by listening hearts. And he says: ‘Prepare this writing[1] to be received by those who hear me; make it green with the juice of sweetness; make it a branching root and a soaring leaf against the devil. Then you will live in eternity. Do not reject these secrets of God, for they are part of that need which is hidden and which has not yet appeared openly.’

May the sweetest fragrance be in you. May you never tire on the path of justice.

STRUGGLES FOR INDEPENDENCE

7. Songs for Saint Disibod

The universal community of the saints was a genuinely felt reality in the lives of Hildegard and her nuns, not only as an example to follow but also as a source of inspiration and a focus of devotion. This was especially true of patron saints of the locality such as Disibod, the seventh-century Irish bishop and hermit who founded a monastery on the summit of the hill that later bore his name. Hildegard spent half her life on the Disibodenberg and must have been highly familiar with its topography. She clearly associated the heights of the mountain with the spiritual stature of the saint to whom she dedicated her verses.

O mirum admirandum. Antiphon for Saint Disibod[1]

O wondrous marvel,
a hidden form shines forth
and rises up in glorious stature
to where the living height
gives forth mystical truths.
Therefore, O Disibod, you will rise up at the end,
as once you were raised,
by the succouring blossom
of all the branches of the world.

O viriditas digiti dei. Responsory for Saint Disibod[2]

O green vigour of the hand of God,
in which God has planted a vineyard,
it shines in the heights

like a stately column,
You are glorious in your preparation for God.

And O mountain on high
you will never weaken in God's testing
but you stand far off like an exile.
The armoured man does not have the power
to seize you.
You are glorious in your preparation for God.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. You are glorious in your preparation for God.

8. Letter to Hartwig of Bremen

Hartwig of Bremen was the brother of Richardis of Stade, and presumably well-known to Hildegard.[1] *His mother, Marchioness (Margravin) Richardis, was related to the family of futta von Spanheim, and gave Hildegard her support during the preparations for the move to Rupertsberg which began in the late 11408. Hartwig himself became Archbishop of Bremen in 1148 and immediately began a policy of extending the power and influence of his see in the north and north-east, often in direct conflict with his enemy Henry the Lion, the powerful Duke of Saxony and Bavaria and head of the Welf dynasty.*

Hildegard to Hartwig, Archbishop of Bremen, after 1148 [Letter 11]

Consider the One who saw you on the first day, who gave you eyes to see with; who gave you the wings of all creation to fly with. Consider the One who made human beings to be a mirror to the fullness of all his miracles, so that the knowledge of God would shine in them, as it is written: 'You are gods and all of you are sons of the most high'.[2] May he look upon you, and direct you to his will.

Whenever human reason imitates God, then a human being can reach God, who has neither beginning nor end. For God is revealed by the knowledge of good and evil. This is what the wheel of eternity is like.

May God himself so act that you flee the evil which began on the first day, the evil which lacks all good will and is forever opposed to God. May he set within you the windows that shine in the heavenly Jerusalem, the beautiful structures of the Virtues. May he cause you to soar in God's loving embrace. As the one on whom God poured

his blessing said: ‘Who are these that fly as clouds, and as doves to their windows?’[3]

And again, consider this: I, a poor female, saw you in the light of salvation. Fulfil now the commandments of God, given you by his grace, and taught to you by his Holy Spirit.

9. Song for Saint Ursula

Hildegard reserved a special devotion for the martyrs of the faith such as Ursula, killed with her many companions at Cologne by the Huns during the Dark Ages, and she wrote two songs to be sung in her honour in church. The sequence as a type of song was intended to be inserted into the liturgy of the mass; divided into stanzas, its form gave scope for longer meditations on a particular theme. The exact date when the following sequence was composed is not known, but the lines spoken by Ursula's detractors ('In the innocence of her girlish ignorance, she does not know what she is saying) have an obvious application to Hildegard and the opposition she experienced in the early years of her life and work. Whether consciously or unconsciously, Hildegard may have identified with the pilgrim Ursula in her own plans for departure to a new community at the Rupertsberg.

O Ecclesia oculi tui. Sequence[1]

O Church, your eyes are like sapphire,[2]
and your ears like Mount Bethel,[3]
your nose is like a mountain of myrrh and incense,[4]
your mouth the sound of many waters.[5]

In a vision of true faith,
Ursula loved the Son of God,
she abandoned husband and worldly life
and gazed at the sun,
calling the fair youth and saying:

'I have eagerly desired[6]
to come to you at the heavenly nuptials
and sit with you,

running to you on the pilgrim way like a cloud[7]
racing through the purest air like a sapphire.'

And after Ursula had said this,
a rumour went through the people.

And they said: 'In the innocence of her girlish ignorance,
she does not know what she is saying.'

And they began to make fun of her,
singing their songs,[8]
until the fiery burden fell on her.

Then they all acknowledged her,
for rejection of the world is like Mount Bethel.
And they acknowledged also
the pleasant fragrance of myrrh and incense,
since rejection of the world had descended upon all.

Then the devil sent out his troops
to murder the most noble behaviour in their bodies.

And all the elements heard this with a loud cry
and they shouted before the throne of God:

'Alas the red of the Lamb's innocent blood
has flowed
at this betrothal.'

May all the heavens hear,
may they praise the Lamb of God in highest harmony,
because the ancient serpent's throat
has been choked with necklace of pearls[9]
made of the material of the Word of God.[10]

10. The Trials of the Soul (from *Scivias* I, 4)

The first few chapters of Scivias I, 4 *form a separate section prior to a discussion of the physiology of human conception and Church teachings on marriage. Two of the chapter titles describe the text as 'the lament of the soul on the path of error but returning through the grace of God to her mother Zion' (ch. 1) and 'the wings of the soul' (ch. 2), both of which give some indication of the theme. It is tempting to see a link between the spiritual states symbolized in this story and Hildegard's own tribulations as she gradually gained recognition as a writer and spiritual leader. She returned to a similar plot for her drama of Anima (Soul) in the* Play of the Virtues (13). *The theme of the runaway daughter is also of interest, for it links the story to the later departures of Richardis and Adelheid (12).*

The accompanying illustration in the Rupertsberg manuscript shows, in its main frame, a golden light pouring life into a woman's womb. To the right of the larger picture is a vertical row of five smaller framed pictures depicting the soul in her tent, the soul threatened by a torrent of waters on a mountain peak, the soul afflicted by scorpion creatures, the soul in a wine-press, and the soul being led out to eat with pigs. All of these scenes form part of the symbolic drama of the soul as told in the text here.

1–2. *The lament of the soul*

Where am I in my exile?[1] In the shadow of death. What is this path I am walking on? The path of error. And what comfort do I have? The comfort of pilgrims.

I was to have had a tent, a tabernacle[2] decorated with five square stones that shone brighter than the sun and the stars. And the stones were to shine not with the rising sun and stars but with the glory of

the angels. Its foundations were to be topaz, with gemstones[3] for its roof and walls. Its steps were to be covered with crystal and its streets paved with gold. I was to be the companion of angels!

For I am the living breath[4] which God breathed into the dry dust of the earth. And so I was to know God and to feel God.

But what misfortune! When the tent of my body realized that it could cast its eyes in all directions it pitched itself towards the north.[5] Abomination![6] There I was captured and robbed of my sight and joy of knowledge. All my garments were torn to shreds!

And so I was drummed out of my inheritance. My captors dragged me to this place of exile without beauty or honour. They threw me into slavery. They beat me with their fists and made me eat with the pigs.[7] They sent me to a desert place and gave me bitter herbs to eat dipped in honey. Then they laid me in a wine-press[8] and subjected me to many torments. They pulled off my clothes, striking me with many blows and sending me out to hunt.

And I was made to catch all manner of evil and venomous worms, like scorpions and vipers, which sprayed me all over with their poison till I sickened with weakness. They mocked me then and said, ‘Where is your honour now?’

I trembled all over, groaning in my misery, and I said: Where am I? Oh where have I come from? What comfort can I look for in this captivity? How can I break these chains? What eye can see my wounds and what nostrils can bear the stench of this affliction? What hand can anoint my wounds with oil? Who will ever show me mercy in my pain?

May Heaven hear my cry! May the Earth tremble at my misery and all that live on her have pity for my captivity! I am oppressed by bitter pains, for I am a pilgrim without comfort or support. Who will console me, for my mother has left me because I strayed from the way of salvation. None will help me but God!

Oh Zion, my mother, when I remember how I would have dwelt with you, then I look at this bitter captivity into which I have been thrown! And when I recall all the harmonies of music[9] within you,

then I can only consider my wounds. And when I remember the joys and delights of your glory, then I curse these poisons with which they are polluted.

Where shall I turn? Where shall I run to? My pain is immeasurable, since if I remain in this evil plight, I will be a companion to them – the ones I knew shamefully in the country of Babylon. Where are you, Zion my mother? What misfortune! If only I had not left you! I could bear this pain more easily if I did not know you.

Now I shall flee these evil companions! Wretched Babylon has loaded me with weights of lead; she oppresses me with heavy timbers so that I can scarcely breathe. But when I cry out to you, my mother, in my tears, wretched Babylon pours forth a crashing sound of rushing waters so that you cannot hear my voice. In great trouble, therefore, I will seek the narrow ways. And so I will escape my evil companions and my miserable captivity!

When I had spoken these words, I ran down the narrow path and hid myself in a small cave towards the north, weeping bitterly since I had lost my mother. Here too I considered all my pain and all my wounds. Here I cried and wept, pouring out my tears so that all the pain and malice of my wounds were flooded with my tears.

Suddenly, a pleasant fragrance touched my nostrils, like a gentle breeze sent to me from my mother. What sighs I uttered and what tears I shed when I felt that modicum of comfort! I cried and wept such tears of joy that even the mountain was moved in whose cave I had hidden.

And I said, ‘O mother, mother Zion! What will become of me? Where is your noble daughter now? For how long, for how long will I be without your motherly tenderness, without the great delight and joy with which you bring me up?’ With these tears I was as glad as if I had actually seen my mother.

But my enemies heard my cries and said, ‘Where is our companion whom we have had until now to do everything we desired? Look how she calls on the citizens of heaven! Let us employ all our skills to guard her with great care and attention so that she

cannot escape us! Remember we had her completely in our power! If we do this, then she will follow us again.'

But I slipped out quietly from the cave where I had been hiding. I aimed to climb so high that my enemies could not find me. But they released such a sea of raging water against me that there was no way I could get over it. There was a bridge, but it was so small and narrow that I could not cross it. And on the other shore of the sea the mountains were so tall and jagged that I could not journey there either. And I said, 'What can a poor creature do now? For a little while I was able to feel the benevolent presence of my mother, and I thought she would lead me back to her. But now she has deserted me! Where am I to turn? If I turn back now to my former captivity, my enemies will mock me more than ever before! I cried to my mother in tears and felt her sweet presence, but now she has abandoned me again!'

But I had been given strength by the sweet comforting influence of my mother which I had felt before. So now I turned to the east and set out again on the narrow paths. The paths were so full of thorns and briars and other obstacles that I could hardly make any headway. Eventually, with much effort and stress, I made my way through, though almost breathless with exhaustion from my labours.

Tired and exhausted as I was, I at last reached the summit of the mountain in which I had previously hidden, and made my way towards a gully where I had to descend. But there I stopped and looked. Vipers, scorpions, lizards and various other species of reptile were hissing their tongues at me and blocking the way down!

'Mother, where are you?' I screamed in my terror. 'I could have borne this pain more easily if I'd never felt your presence before. Now I'll be thrown into captivity again where I was kept for so long! Where is your help now?'

It was then that I heard my mother's voice speaking to me, 'Run, my daughter, run, for you have been granted wings to fly with by the great Giver whom none can resist. Quickly, therefore, fly over all these creatures opposing you.' And then, with a great feeling of

comfort and release, I took up my wings and flew quickly over those venomous and death-dealing vipers.

3. *The tabernacle*

And I came to a tabernacle, the inside of which was made of the hardest steel. And entering in, I performed works of light where before I had done deeds of darkness.

In this tabernacle, therefore, towards the north, I set up a pillar of unpolished iron on which I hung small fans of various feathers moving back and forth. I found manna, and I ate it.

Towards the east I built a fortification of square stones, kindling a fire within. Here I drank myrrh-flavoured wine with grape-must.

Towards the south I made a tower of square stones on which I hung red shields; in the windows I placed trumpets of ivory. And in the middle of the tower I poured out honey and prepared a precious ointment of various spices, so that its strong fragrance permeated all of the tabernacle.

Towards the west, however, I did no work, since that part was turned towards the world.

But while I was occupied with this labour, my enemies took up their quivers and attacked my tabernacle with their arrows. Because of the zeal with which I was doing my work, I did not notice the frenzy of their attacks until the door of the tabernacle was filled with arrows. Nevertheless none of their arrows was able to pierce the door or the steel covering of the tabernacle, and so I could not be harmed by them.[10]

Seeing this, they sent a great torrent of waters to throw me down with my tabernacle, but they achieved nothing with their evil actions. Without any fear now, I derided them for their failure and said, ‘The Craftsman who made this tabernacle is stronger and wiser than you are. Gather up your arrows therefore and take them away, for they cannot give you the victory you desire. Look and see: they have caused no injury!’

‘I have fought many wars against you in great hardship and pain. You tried to bring me to my death but were unable, for I was armed with the most powerful of weapons; I brandished sharp swords against you and defended myself vigorously. Depart, therefore, and leave me, for you can do nothing more against me!’

7. *How anger, hatred and pride are overcome*

When anger is about to burn up my tabernacle, I look to the goodness of God, whom anger has never touched, and so I become softer than the air which waters the dry earth with its sweetness. Then the virtues and powers manifest the force of their green vigour within me, and spiritual joy is mine! In this way I *feel* the goodness of God!

But when hatred attempts to defame me, I look to the mercy and the pain of God’s Son, and so I contain my flesh, receiving the sweet fragrance of roses from the thorns which grew up in memory of the Faithful One. In this way I acknowledge my Saviour!

And when pride[11] strives to build without a firm foundation rock and raise up his tower of vanity within me, and when he is about to reach a great height that none can equal, and when I appear higher than the others: oh, who will come to my aid? This is the ancient serpent wishing to be greater than all! It is he who has fallen into death and is trying now to throw me down with him! In great sadness then I say: ‘Where is my king and my God? What good can I do without God? No good!’

And I look to the God who gave me life, and I run to the blessed Virgin who toppled the cave of pride of the ancient serpent.[12] In this way I become a strong stone in God’s building. And the ravenous wolf who expired on the hook of divinity can no longer overcome me. And in this way I acknowledge the sweetest good, that is humility, in the height of God. I taste the savour of unfading balsam and rejoice in the sweetness of God, as if I was inside the fragrance of all fragrances! In this way also I repel the other vices with the strong shield of humility.

12. *The words of Ezekiel*

‘Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit.’[13] You who travel the paths of the Sun which the blessed sheep walk! You who would persevere on the path of justice! Cast away from the knowledge of your hearts the study of forbidden things that do not benefit the wisdom of the king. You think to soar to the heights of vanity, while you plunge to the depths of the sea, where there is no goodness, where the fearful horror dwells that does not know God. Cast away such things, and you will walk to your salvation on the way of truth. In your hearts then you will bear the glory of the dawn and the breath of new life.

II. Songs for Saint Rupert

According to the Life of Hildegard *by Gottfried of Disibodenberg and Theoderich of Echternach, the call to move from Disibodenberg came to Hildegard in a vision, accompanied by a bout of illness in which she remained until she consented to reveal what the vision had said to her. The place to which she felt called was the Rupertsberg, or Mount St Rupert, a site on a large hill overlooking what is now the modern town of Bingen in the Rhine Valley. At the time of Hildegard's move in 1150, there was just an old ruined chapel dedicated to the eighth-century saint, while the rest of the area was cultivated as a vineyard. Rupert's original monastery had been destroyed by the Vikings in about 882, the foolish men' alluded to in the sequence* O Jerusalem *below. Perhaps not surprisingly, given the popular appeal of hagiography, Rupert became greatly honoured as the patron saint of the new monastery, and Hildegard, who also wrote a* Life of Saint Rupert, *was active in furthering his cult and veneration. As she saw it, Rupert's life was short but inspiring, a fact that emerges in the themes of the two antiphons and the second stanza of the sequence below. With echoes of dedication hymns in its text, it is possible that this sequence was sung at the ceremony for the dedication of the new church on the Rupertsberg which probably took place on 1 May 1151.*

O felix apparicio. Antiphon for St Rupert[1]

O joyful sight
when in Rupert, friend of God,
a flame of light ignited,
and the love of God
flowed in his heart

embracing the fear of the Lord.

So also his fame
has flourished among
the citizens of heaven.

O beatissime Ruperte. Antiphon for St Rupert[2]

Blessed Rupert,
who in the bloom of your age
did not produce or bear
the vices of the devil,
but left this shipwrecked world:
intercede now
for your servants in God.
Alleluia.

O Jerusalem. Sequence for St Rupert[3]

O Jerusalem, city of gold[4]
decorated with the purple of the King,
O edifice of the highest good,
you are a light that has never been obscured,
decorated with the dawn, in the heat of the sun.[5]

O blessed boyhood, reddening in the dawn,
and O blessed youth, burning in the sun.

You, noble Rupert,
shone in these like a gemstone
that can never be concealed
by foolish men,
just as a mountain cannot be hidden by the valley below.

Your windows, Jerusalem,
wonderfully decorated
with topaz and sapphire.

Among these you shine, O Rupert,
you are not hidden from lukewarm morals,
just as the mountain,
crowned with roses, lilies and purple blooms

is clearly seen from the valley in a true revelation.[6]

O soft flower of the field
O green vigour of the sweet apple
O weightless burden
that does not involve the heart in evil deeds.

O noble vessel
unpolluted and unconsumed
by the dance in the ancient cave,
unweakened
by the wounds of the ancient enemy.

In you the Holy Spirit sings in harmony
since you have joined the angelic choirs,
decorated by God's Son
and faultless.

You are a vessel of beauty, O Rupert,
in your boyhood and youth you longed for God
in awe of God and in Love's embrace[7]
in the lovely odour of righteous deeds.

O Jerusalem, your foundations were laid
with glowing gemstones
from publicans and sinners,
lost sheep found by God's Son,
they ran to you and were placed in you.

Then your walls gleamed with living gemstones
which through the highest zeal of good will
soared like clouds in the sky.[8]

And your towers, O Jerusalem,
gleam and shine
with the red and incandescent brightness of the saints
and with all the glories of God
in which you abound, O Jerusalem.

O citizens of Jerusalem,
decorated and crowned,

and you, O Rupert, their companion there,
assist us, your maidservants, as we labour in exile.

12. The Departure of Richardis of Stade

With the various difficulties faced by the new community, some of the nuns decided to leave the Rupertsberg, sometimes for positions elsewhere. In 1151 Richardis of Stade was appointed abbess of Bassum, in the diocese of Bremen, where her brother was Archbishop. Hildegard, for various reasons, including her personal affection for Richardis, opposed the appointment. A delegation from Bremen appealed to Archbishop Heinrich of Mainz, the diocese in which the Rupertsberg belonged. When ordered by Heinrich to release Richardis, Hildegard sent the following response (Letter 18R).[1] *Eventually forced to submit, she sent a grieving letter to Richardis herself, now installed at Bassum.*[2]

Hildegard to Heinrich, Archbishop of Mainz, 1151 [Letter 18] R

The clear fountain which is just and not false says this:

These legal pretexts brought in order to obtain authority over this girl are useless before God, for I am the height and the depth, the circle and the descending light. I did not compose or choose these pretexts, which have been issued by the conniving presumption of ignorant hearts. May all the faithful hear them with the open ears of their hearts, and not with the ears that hear outwardly, like animals taking in the sound but not the word.

The Spirit of God says in his zeal:[3] 'Shepherds! Weep and lament for these times, for you do not know what you are doing when you scatter the offices founded in God in favour of opportunities to make money and the human wickedness of evil men who do not have the fear of the Lord.'

Therefore, your curses and your malicious and threatening words are not to be heeded. Your rod and staff have been raised in pride, not in God's service but in the weak presumption of your wicked desires.

Hildegard to Richardis, 1151–2 [Letter 64]

Hear me, my daughter, speaking to you in the Spirit. My grief rises up. That grief is obliterating the great confidence and consolation which I had from another human being. From now on I will say, 'It is good to trust in the Lord, rather than to trust in princes.'[4] Which means that a human being must look to the living height without being obscured by love or by the weakness of faith, which the aerial humour of the earth can have only for a short period. Anyone who looks to God in this way can turn their eyes to the sun like an eagle. A man should not wait upon a person of high rank who fails him like a flower that withers; but I broke this rule in my love for a certain noble human being.

Now I say to you this: whenever I sinned in that way, God made my sin known to me, either in hardships or sufferings, just as he has done about you, as you yourself realize.

Now I have this to say also. Alas for me, a mother and alas for me, a daughter. Why have you forsaken me like an orphan? I loved you for your noble bearing, your wisdom, your purity, your soul and all your life! So much so that many people said, 'What are you doing?'

May all who have a grief like mine mourn with me; all who in their love of God have had the same affection of heart and mind for another human being as I have felt for you – who were snatched away from me at a moment's notice.

Nevertheless, may the angel of God go before you and the Son of God protect you. May his Mother watch over you.

And remember me, your mother Hildegard, so that your happiness will not fade.

13. The First Version of *The Play of the Virtues* (from *Scivias* III, 13)

This dialogue, the first Morality play in medieval literature, occurs with other songs as part of the triumphant finale to Hildegard's Scivias. *Like 'The Trials of the Soul' (10), it tells the story of the flight, oppression by enemies, and eventual return of the errant soul. Its basic thematic structure is an allegory in which the various moral qualities in the human being are conceived and externalized as active forces, the* 'virtutes' *or, as the meaning of the Latin word implies, the 'virtues and powers.' Not yet as fully developed as the* Ordo virtutum (Play of the Virtues) *of 1158,*[1] *since its list of characters is shorter and there is less dramatic breadth, it is perhaps more suitable for reading than the later performance piece. Arguably, there is a stronger focus on the plight of Anima, the personified soul, as she struggles to free herself from the wiles of the deceiver.*

The exact date of the first version of the play is not known, although Abbess Tengswich of Andernach may be referring to a performance of the play in a letter dated 1148–50. One of the letter's criticisms is of Hildegard's unusual liturgical practices, for after a respectful opening, Tengswich continues:

> But a report of something unusual in your practices has also reached us. On feast days, your nuns stand in church chanting psalms with unbound hair and for decorative purposes wear long white silk veils which reach down to the ground. On their heads they wear crowns of woven gold in which crosses have been placed on each side and at the back, while a figure of the lamb is placed neatly at the front. And they adorn their fingers with golden rings. And they do this although the first shepherd of the Church forbade such things in his epistle, saying that women are to dress 'with propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes'.[2]

Since Scivias *itself was completed in 1151, about the time that Richardis and others were leaving the community at the Rupertsberg it is at least*

possible that those external events influenced the contents of the first official written version of the work. But the play is more than a series of allegorized events from the author's biography. Original as a work of literature, its sources include the liturgy, the Bible, particularly the Song of Songs, and the Psychomachia (*or* Struggle of the Soul) *by the late Roman poet Prudentius, in which the final triumph of the soul is also brought about by the virtues seizing the enemy, Discord, and so defeating him.*

9. *For the encouragement of the virtues and the contradiction of the wiles of the devil*

And again that sound was heard, like the voice of a multitude, for the exhortation of the virtues to assist humankind, for the contradiction of the hostile devices of the devil, for the defeat of the vices by the virtues and the return of men and women to penance by divine inspiration. The sound rang out in harmony as follows.

[*THE VIRTUES:*]
We virtues are in God
and remain in God.
We fight for the King of kings
dividing good from evil.
We appeared at the first battle
and gained the victory,
while he who wished to soar above himself fell to the ground.
And so we fight now
and come to the aid of all who call upon us:
we trample the devices of the devil
and we lead those who wish to follow us
to the blessed mansions.

THE COMPLAINT OF THE SOULS, LOCATED IN THE FLESH:
We wayfarers!
What have we done, wandering into sins?
We should have been the daughters of the King
but fell into the shadow of sins!
O living Sun,

transport us on your shoulders
into that most just inheritance
which we lost in Adam!
O King of kings,[3]
we fight in your battle.

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL SOUL:
Sweet divinity,
delightful Life
in which I will wear a bright garment,
accepting what I lost at my first appearance,
I sigh for you, and I invoke all the virtues.

RESPONSE OF THE VIRTUES:
Happy soul,
beautiful creature of God,
you are formed in the profound depths of the wisdom of God,[4]
you express love in great measure.[5]

THE FAITHFUL SOUL:
Oh let me come to you with gladness,
that you may bestow on me the kiss of your heart![6]

VIRTUES:
Daughter of the King,
we must join you in the fight.

THE SOUL, DEJECTED, LAMENTS:
What grievous distress, what a heavy weight
I bear in the garment of this life,
since it is too hard for me to fight against the flesh.

VIRTUES:
O soul, formed by the will of God,
O happy instrument,
why are you so weak when you face
what God defeated through the nature of the Virgin?
In us you are bound to conquer the devil!

SOUL:
Give me your support and help me

to stand firm!

KNOWLEDGE OF GOD SPEAKS TO THE SOUL:
Look to the garment you wear,
daughter of salvation!
Be strong,
and you will never fall.

THE SOUL:
I do not know what I will do or where I will flee!
This is hard for me: I cannot bring to perfection
the garment in which I am clothed.
I would rather cast it from me!

VIRTUES:
Unhappy Mind!
Distressed Soul!
Why do you hide your face before your Creator?[7]

KNOWLEDGE OF GOD TO THE SOUL:
You do not know him,
you do not see or taste
the One who made you.

SOUL:
God created the world:
I am not doing him any harm,
I simply want to enjoy it!

THE DEVIL TEMPTS THE SOUL:
You labour foolishly, foolishly!
How does it benefit you?
Look to the world,
and it will embrace you in great honour!

VIRTUES:
Alas, alas.[8]
Virtues, let us grieve and mourn
because the sheep of the Lord has fled this life![9]

HUMILITY:

I, Humility, queen of the virtues, say this:
Come to me, virtues,
and I will empower you to recover the lost drachma[10]
and crown the happy soul in her perseverance.[11]

VIRTUES:
O glorious Queen, most delightful intermediary,
we come rejoicing.

HUMILITY:
For this reason, my dearly beloved daughters,
I hold a place for you in the royal marriage chamber.[12]
O daughters of Israel,
God awakened you under the apple tree.[13]
At this time, therefore, remember his planting of the seed.
Rejoice, daughters of Zion!

THE DEVIL'S LOUD NOISE TO HUMILITY AND THE OTHER VIRTUES:
What is this power,[14]
as if there were none beside God alone?[15]
It is I that tell you this:
whoever will follow me and my will,
I will give them everything.[16]
As for you and your followers,
you have nothing to give!
Why, none of you
even know who you are!

HUMILITY RESPONDS:
In truth I and my companions know
that you are the ancient dragon.
You wished to fly higher than the highest,
until God himself threw you into the abyss.

VIRTUES:
And as for all of us, we live in the heights!

THE LAMENT OF THE PENITENT SOUL, IN THE BODY, CALLING ON THE VIRTUES:[17]
Royal Virtues!

How beautiful and bright you are in the height of the sun.
And how sweet is your habitation.
And how terrible for me that I have fled from you!

VIRTUES:
Return, fugitive! Return to us,
and God will receive you!

THE PENITENT SOUL IN THE BODY:
Ah, I have been swallowed up by the terrible sweetness of sins!
I have not dared to return!

VIRTUES:
Do not fear and do not flee,
for you are the lost sheep whom the Good Shepherd[18] is seeking.

THE PENITENT SOUL IN THE BODY:
Now I need you to receive me back,
because I stink from the wounds
with which the ancient serpent has defiled me.

VIRTUES:
Run to us,
follow the footsteps in which you will never fall
with us as your companions,
and God will heal you.

THE PENITENT SOUL IN THE BODY:
I am a sinner who fled from Life:
covered with sores[19] I return to you,
that you may offer me the shield of redemption.

VIRTUES:
Runaway soul, be strong,
and put on the armour of light.

THE PENITENT SOUL IN THE BODY:
You, all the cohort of the Queen,
and you, the white lilies and red roses,
bend down to me,
because I exiled myself from you as a wayfaring stranger,

and help me, that I may rise up through the blood of God's Son.
Humility, true healer,
give me your help,
for Pride has broken me with many vices
and afflicted me with many scars.
I flee to you now:
therefore receive me!

HUMILITY TO THE VIRTUES:
All you virtues,
receive this sinner in mourning, with all her scars,
for the sake of the wounds of Christ,
and lead her to me.

VIRTUES TO THE PENITENT SOUL IN THE BODY:
We will take you back
and we will not desert you,
and all the host of heaven will be glad for you:[20]
now is the time to sound forth in harmony.[21]

HUMILITY TO THE PENITENT SOUL:
Unhappy daughter, I will embrace you:
the great healer has suffered hard and bitter wounds
for your sake.

DEVIL:
Who are you? Where have you come from?
You embraced me,
and I led you out.
Now you confound me in your reversal,
but I will throw you down in my struggle!

PENITENT SOUL REJECTING THE DEVIL:
When I realized all your ways were evil
I fled from you,
but now, deceiver,
I fight against you.

PENITENT SOUL TO HUMILITY:
Therefore, Queen Humility,
help me with your medicine!

HUMILITY, TO VICTORY AND THE OTHER VIRTUES:
Victory, who once conquered him in Heaven!
Run with your soldiers
and all of you bind the devil!

VICTORY, TO THE VIRTUES:
Come, strong and glorious soldiers!
Help me defeat the deceiver!

VIRTUES TO VICTORY:
Gentle warrior in the rushing water from the source
which swallowed up the ravenous wolf!
Glorious crown-bearer!
Gladly we will fight with you against that deceiver.

HUMILITY TO THE VIRTUES:
Bind him therefore,
shining Virtues!

VIRTUES:
We will obey you, our Queen
and fulfill your commands in all things.

VICTORY:
Rejoice, my companions,
that the ancient serpent is bound!

VIRTUES:
Praise to you, Christ, King of the angels!
O God, who are you that
contained in yourself that great counsel
which destroyed the hellish potion
among publicans and sinners
who now shine in the eternal light of goodness!
Praise to you, therefore, O King!
Father Almighty,
from whom the river flowed in a fiery blaze,
lead your sons and daughters to sail the waters with a good wind
so that thus we may bring them
to the heavenly Jerusalem.

THE SIBYL OF THE RHINE

14. Three Political Letters

As Hildegard became established at Rupertsberg, she began to gain a reputation for prophecy and political wisdom as well as theological understanding, and it was in this role as adviser and prophetess that she became known as the 'Sibyl of the Rhine'. Soon her direct advice was being sought, and given, in the current affairs of the German Empire and the Church. The letters here, though difficult to date precisely, illustrate aspects of this activity.

The letter to Pope Eugenius III is markedly different in tone from her earlier one to the same correspondent (6); the language is more apocalyptic, with the sword of divine justice circling in the air, and there is some intriguing animal imagery. It is tempting to relate the image of the bear to the new king of Germany, Frederick Barbarossa, who signed a political agreement with Eugenius at the Treaty of Constance in 1153.

The letter to Henry (Bishop of Liège 1145–64) is similarly urgent, with its imagery of dark clouds ominously threatening the mountain of flowers and gentle breezes. The dark clouds are a less precise kind of metaphor than that of the bear, but the implication is that the Church is somehow threatened. Henry was loyal to Barbarossa and took part in the first Italian expedition of 1154, attending the Emperor's coronation by Pope Hadrian IV in 1155.

Hadrian IV was an Englishman and vigorous politician who at first honoured the Treaty of Constance by ousting the leader of the Senate, Arnold of Brescia, from Rome and by crowning Barbarossa as Emperor. But his agreement with King William I of Norman Sicily in 1156 brought a radical change of policy. In October 1157 a letter from Hadrian, delivered by his legates to the Diet of Besançon, provoked a bitter row

with Barbarossa and his chancellor Rainald Dassel, who interpreted its requirements as a threat to imperial power. Hildegard's letter to Hadrian presents a series of apocalyptic images and metaphors which, although bafflingly unclear, are of undoubted relevance to the events of Hadrian's pontificate.

Hildegard to Pope Eugenius III, 1148–53 [Letter 3]

He who is not silent speaks – because of the weakness of those who are too blind to see, too deaf to hear, too dumb to speak – that robbers lie in wait by night[1] with death-dealing weapons! And what does he say? The sword circles and turns, killing those who are evil in mind!

You in your person are a shining breastplate,[2] the primary root, the presider at Christ's nuptials with the Church. But you are divided in your attentions. On the one hand your soul is renewed in the mystic flower that is the companion of virginity;[3] on the other, you are the branch of the Church.[4] Listen to the One who strikes with his name and flows in the torrent; listen to him speaking to you: do not cast the eye from the eye, do not cut off the light from the light; but stand on the even path, lest you be accused for the sake of those souls who have been placed in your bosom. Do not allow them to sink in the lake of perdition through the power of the feasting prelates!

A jewel lies on the path, but a bear[5] comes along. Seeing the beautiful jewel, he stretches out a paw to seize it and place it in his bosom. But suddenly an eagle appears, snatches the jewel, wraps it in the cover of his wings and bears it away to the inner courtyard of the palace of the king. That very jewel shines out its radiance in the presence of the king. And for love of the jewel, the king presents the eagle with golden shoes,[6] praising him highly for his goodness.

You now, the viceroy of Christ, seated on the throne of the Church, choose for yourself the better part,[7] that you may be the eagle overcoming the bear! Adorn the inner courtyard of the Church

in the souls entrusted to you, so that in your golden shoes you may come to the heights and remove yourself far from the intruder's grasp!

Hildegard to Henry, Bishop of Liège,[8] 1148–53 [Letter 37R]

The living light says: the paths of the scriptures lead directly to the high mountain,[9] where the flowers grow and the costly aromatic herbs; where a pleasant wind blows, bringing forth their powerful fragrance; where the roses and lilies reveal their shining faces. But because of the shadows of dark living air, that mountain did not appear until the Son of the most High had enlightened the world. On that day, the sun rose from the dawn, illuminating this world so that all the people could see its aromatic herbs. That day was very beautiful, and sweet tidings came forth.

But O shepherds, now is the time for mourning and weeping, because in our time the mountain has been covered with a very black cloud so that it no longer sends forth its gentle fragrance. You, Henry, must be a good shepherd, noble of character. And just as the eagle gazes at the sun, ponder and consider how you can call back the wanderers and exiles and bring some light to this mountain, so that you will live, and so that you will hear the most loving voice of the Judge on high: 'Well done, good and faithful servant.'[10] Then your soul will shine with light like a soldier brilliant in the fight, who rejoices with his comrades because he has gained the victory.

Therefore, teacher of the people, fight for the good victory. Correct those in error, and so wash the mud from the beautiful pearls.[11] Prepare them for the high king. Let your mind pant with great eagerness to call those pearls back to the mountain where the gift of God had its origin. May God protect you now and free your soul from eternal punishment.

Hildegard to Pope Hadrian IV, 1155 [Letter 9]

The one who gives life to the living says this. O man, you will sustain the fearful rage of lionesses and the great strength of leopards. You will experience shipwreck in the taking of spoils. For you have been given over to all those who seek refuge with you in their state of exhaustion. Nevertheless you have a ready understanding with which to pit yourself against the fierce behaviour of men. In raging at them you hang on firmly to the manes of the galloping horses which run ceaselessly along the tracks of plunder. But you fight against yourself when at times you favour the apparent probity of certain people if you hide the treasure-chests of those killed in conflict on the open roads. Therefore you will suffer a fierce battle. But you will destroy the movable goods of the rest, who will fall into the pit because of their asperity. Yet you have the power of the strong key,[12] which does not go willingly in the form of a ruby to the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

In your heart, therefore, seek the salvation of waters so that you do not fall into the whirlwind, and so that you may remain gentle to the distress and pain of those who are afflicted by the torment of many wounds, thus imitating your Saviour, who will redeem you. And God will not leave you,[13] but you will see in his light.[14]

15. Songs for the Dedication of a Church

The first of the following antiphons was perhaps written in 1155 If Hildegard wrote the song for the dedication of a particular church building its identity is unknown, but the 'church' twice mentioned in the text must also be seen as the universal Church, facing its enemies the 'most savage wolf' and the 'cunning serpent' (i.e. the devil). In the second antiphon, the serpent is defeated and the Church can rejoice in harmony that all its children have been reunited. The imagery could be understood on a number of levels, from a survey of salvation history on one level to a prediction of the last things on another. In view of the animal imagery in the letter to Pope Hadrian IV, it may be that the 'wolf' ofO virgo ecclesia *represents a particular threat to the Church at the time when the song was composed, one possibility being the threat to papal supremacy of the still powerful Roman Commune under Arnold of Brescia.*[1] *The threat was removed by the Pope's own swift actions after his election to the papal see in December 1154. Shortly before Easter in 1155, when one of the cardinals was attacked and wounded by Arnold's followers, Hadrian placed an interdict over the whole of the population of Rome, shutting all the churches until Arnold and his party had been banished from Rome. Under pressure from the citizens and clergy, the Senate agreed, and the Pope was able to celebrate Easter in triumph.*

O virgo ecclesia. Antiphon[2]

O virgin church, you must lament
that the most savage wolf
has seized your children from your side.
Woe to the cunning serpent!
But how precious is the blood of the Saviour!
In the banner of the king[3]
he has pledged the Church to himself

so that she now seeks her children.

Nunc gaudeant. Antiphon[4]

May the maternal heart of the Church now rejoice
that her sons have been gathered to her lap
in heavenly harmony.
Therefore, shameful serpent, you are confounded,
because those you thought were in your heart
now shine in the blood of God's son.
Praise to you, King on high, alleluia.

16. Teachings on the Church (from *Scivias*)

The principles on which Hildegard based her advice and admonitions to the principal churchmen and politicians of her day are set out extensively in the pages of Scivias, *from which the following extracts are taken. The book was much in demand: in the early 1150s, for instance, Archbishop Arnold of Cologne expressed a wish to have a copy, for he was 'unable and unwilling to be without it'.*[1] *In responding to his request, Hildegard sent the following message as a covering letter:*

Now, as you wished, shepherd of your people, I (a poor woman) have sent you my writings of the true visions to you. They contain nothing of human ingenuity and nothing of my own will. Instead, these writings contain the things which the Unceasing Light wished and desired to make known through its own composition and in its own words. Even this letter which I am writing to you now was composed not by my own reason but by heavenly disposition.

Within the 'writings of the true visions', as Hildegard called them, Archbishop Arnold would have found much of practical use, for her teachings on the Church cover not only theological and doctrinal issues but also social matters and questions relating to ethics. Hildegard has much to say on the sacraments, the role of the monastic orders, and the duties of priests and bishops. She uses characteristic vocabulary, such as 'perfumes' for priests, and adapts images and stories from the Bible, such as the theme of the 'green garden', employed here to attack the frequent twelfth-century practice of dedicating young children against their will to the monastic life.

The words of Isaiah [Scivias I, 4, 32]

'The Lord sent a word into Jacob, and it has lighted upon Israel.'[2] This means that the Word, through whom all things were created, the firstborn of God who before the beginning of time was ever-

present through his divinity in the Father's heart, was sent by the Lord, the heavenly Father, through the mouth of the prophets to the people of Jacob. They proclaimed faithfully that the Son of God would bring salvation into the world so that humanity, prepared and armed, might throw down the devil and cleverly turn aside his cunning deceptions. And so the Word lighted upon Israel when God's firstborn lighted upon the green vigour of the maiden that no man had known. She preserved her blossom immaculate, in order that the One born of the Maiden should lead back to the true path all people, who in the darkness of deception had lost the light of truth, and grant them lasting salvation.

The words of the prophet Isaiah [I, 5, 3]

'Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows?'[3] Who are these who have withdrawn in their hearts from earthly and fleshly desires in order to soar in full devotion towards heavenly things? They strengthen their bodily senses in dovelike simplicity, without bitter gall. In the ardent zeal of virtue they seek refuge in the solid rock that is the Firstborn of God. For they are the ones who for love of heaven trample under their feet the kingdoms of the earth and seek the things of heaven. Thus the Synagogue admired the Church, because she realized that she herself is not protected by such virtues as she sees in the Church. The Church is ringed with guardian angels lest the devil tear her down and throw her to the ground, but God has left the Synagogue lying with her failings.

The parable of the balsam, the onyx and the carbuncle [II, 3, 13]

Balsam drips from a tree. Strong medicines pass from the onyx vessel in which they are kept. The bright radiance of the carbuncle passes out of that gemstone without hindrance.[4] In the same way, the Son of God was born of a maiden without the hindrance of corruption. And in the same way also, Christ's bride the Church

gives birth to her children without the hindrance of error, and yet remains a maiden, intact in her faith.

[The unarmed youth on the road] (II, 3, 16–17)

There are two signs of the law handed down and known to men: circumcision in the time of the fathers of the Old Testament and baptism[5] in the time of the teachers of the New Testament. With these two, humanity is tied to the yoke like the ox yoked to the plough. Although the ox is driven forward with the goad, it would pull crooked furrows if it were not tied to the yoke. Similarly men and women will not walk my ways[6] unless they are tied to the yoke of the signs of the law.

The same is true of the youth who was to travel on the road.[7] If his father told him 'walk straight ahead!' but did not give him a sword or any other weapon to defend himself with, what would happen? If he was unarmed he would flee. He would neither dare nor be able to defend himself against any danger that befell him and threatened to divert him from his path. He would conceal himself if he did not have any defensive weapons to protect him. In the same way, my people would be unarmed if they were not baptized and thus able to inspire fear in their enemies, who see them signed with the anointing of baptism. So furnished, they bravely withstand those who wish to destroy them, whether it is a crowd of people or the devil's army.

[The rich landlord and the steward] [II, 3, 36]

[The voice from heaven:] A rich landlord has a steward who allots his goods fairly to those who are eligible and exercises his office loyally. If this steward is found guilty of some other misdeed, his lord will nevertheless not dismiss him ungraciously from his service. He will however say to him, 'you are wicked for what you have done.' He will be angry with him in his heart, but he will still graciously accept the administration of his justice. In the same way

I, who have many stewards, will not hesitate to accept the office of the sacrament said by a legitimately consecrated priest, even if he is guilty of other misdeeds. Though I consider him an opponent for his unjust deeds, I will not refuse to accept from him what is my due.

[Sun, moon and stars] [from II, 5]

[The voice from heaven:] These are great mysteries. Consider the sun, moon and stars. I created the sun to light the day and the moon and stars to light the night. The sun signifies my Son, who came forth from my heart and shone in the world when, at the end of the ages, he was born of a maiden just as the sun breaks forth, rising at the end of the night, and lighting up the world.

The moon signifies the Church, who is espoused to my Son in a heavenly marriage. And just as the moon, according to its disposition, is continuously waxing and waning, not shining by its own power but kindled instead by the light of the sun, so the Church also goes through stages. She waxes when her children gain increase of virtues, and wanes through deviant behaviour or destructive hostilities against her. It happens frequently that she is attacked in her mysteries by thieving wolves, that is evil people, whether bad Christians, Jews or Pagans. But she is not kindled with the power to resist from within herself but from me. My Son shines on her so that she will persevere with the good.

The stars vary considerably in their power to shine. They signify the members of the various orders in the hierarchy of the Church.

[The adulterous servant] [II, 5,11]

[The voice from heaven:] If a great secular lord had a bride very dear to him and if a servant dishonoured her in adultery, what would the lord do? You can be sure that in his raging anger he would send out his army to destroy the servant, because his action had struck him to the very core. But if the servant came in fear and pleaded for mercy before the whole army, and fell down in tears at

the feet of his lord, then the lord in his goodness, and because of the plea, would preserve his life and return him to the community of his fellow servants. But he will not reward him as he does his trusted friends and companions, although he grants him the grace he deserves among his fellow servants of the same rank.

The same goes for the man who seduces and hurts a bride of the eternal King. In righteous anger the King proclaims his judgement and delivers him to destruction, wishing, because of this deed, to remove the deceiver out of his sight. But if the miscreant, anticipating the day of his fall from favour, humbly pleads with God's elect to intercede for his acquittal, and if he looks in tears to the humanity of his Redeemer in order that through the Lord's mercy he may be acquitted of his sin, then the King will pay heed to the blood that was shed for the salvation of humanity. He will consider the love of the citizens of heaven, separating the servant from his guilt and from the power of the devil, lest he perish, and numbering him among the chosen souls of the blessed. But the King will not reward him at the royal wedding dance or allow him among the ranks of the other friends of God and the holy virgins consecrated in heavenly marriage with my Son. He will not crown him with a virgin's crown, since he has lost that modesty, though he will grant him, with the other elect, the incomparable reward of the joys of the heavenly city.

[The good samaritan] [II, 5,14]

'And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said to him, Take care of him; and whatever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.'[8] What does this mean?

On the first day of salvation, when God's Son wonderfully became man and lived on the earth in the body, he performed many remarkable deeds in his human life up to the time of the resurrection. And so he brought the wounded man to be healed with the remedies of truth. But on the morrow, that is, after his

resurrection, when all the mysteries of truth had been deposited in the Church, he offered the two covenants, the Old and the New, as a clear sign and allusion to the life eternal and the nourishment of the faithful.

And through his grace, he gave these writings to the shepherds of the Church, who guard his flock, and spoke these words of gentle admonishment to them, 'Take care of the Christian people whom I have redeemed with my blood and entrusted to you; and take care lest they lack what pertains to life and wander from the path. I, your guide and Saviour, am leaving the world to ascend to my Father. I give these to your keeping, and if in good will you add to them by doing more than is commanded of you, I will reward you for your work and good will with an increase of fruit. I will come again to judge the transient world and transform it so that it will no longer be weakened by the course of time. And I will say to you, "Well done you good and faithful servant."[9] Whoever adds more to his vows than the law requires will receive a double reward; for I will treat his name with honour because he has loved me so much.'

[The parable of the house builders] [II, 5, 29]

I compare [lukewarm clerics] to the foolish workmen who erect a large tall building but do not imitate the skills of other craftsmen who know very well how to use their tools and are experienced in the many difficulties of building work. They know very well what is needed for the construction work and use all their tools appropriately. These others, however, place all their vain and foolish trust in themselves because they want to excel the others in their skill. They do not build their houses strong enough to withstand the storms; so the winds tear them down, because they are built not on rock but on sand.[10]

This is how people behave who trust in themselves in their presumption and want to appear cleverer than the old fathers; they do not behave according to the covenant but indiscriminately make new laws as they see fit. They are often driven to sin, therefore, by

the temptations of the devil, because they are grounded not in Christ but in the inconstancy of their own behaviour.

[Archangels, angels and human beings] [II, 5, 36]

Preserve love and peace among you, as the souls of the just have love and peace with the angels and the angels with the archangels. For the souls of the just do not envy the angels their office, and the angels do not envy the glory of the archangels. What does this mean? Archangels convey weighty messages in times of need, while angels proclaim the less important, frequently recurring matters, and the faithful people obey in humility.

Each therefore performs its office faithfully. How should this be understood?

The monastic orders are a living fragrance sworn to follow the path of special renewal. Like the archangels they must give irreplaceable support to the Church in times of need. The perfumers – the priestly orders – should perform their frequent duties like the angels, in zealous determination. And the people, who wish to attain to the blessed state, should accept their words in good faith. How should we understand this?

[The monastic orders, priesthood and laity] [II, 5, 37]

The monastic orders sworn to follow the path of special renewal are the corn that provides the people with simple and wholesome food. In this way my people are strengthened and hardened against enjoying the taste of worldly things. The perfumers – the priests – are the fruit, sweet-tasting to those who eat of it; thus the priests in performing their useful office are attractive to people. The ordinary laity may be regarded as the flesh, amongst which there is also clean poultry, for by their fleshly existence in the world they bring forth children, among whom there are also followers of chastity such as widows and ascetics, who soar to their heavenly desires through their demand for good virtues.

[On oblates][11] [II, 5, 46]

[The voice of the Lord:] I had a green flourishing field. Did I give it you, O human being, so that you could produce fruit according to your own wishes? When you have sown the seed, can you yourself transform it into fruit? Not at all. You do not send the dew, nor do you cause the rain to fall; you do not provide the moisture of fresh greenness nor do you bring forth the warmth of the sunlight. All this is needed to produce fruit.

In the same way, you can sow a word in a person's ear, but as for his heart, which is my field, you can send it neither the dew of contrition nor the rain of fresh tears; you can pour out neither the moisture of devotion nor the warmth of the Holy Spirit. And all these are needed to bring forth the fruit of holiness.

And how could you move the child consecrated in baptism and without his consent deliver him up by the worst of deceptions, forcing him to bear my yoke? And so he could be neither green nor dry, since he had not died to the world and did not live for the world either. Why did you push him so far that he could do neither one nor the other?

The marvellous workings of God, which will strengthen him to persevere in the spiritual vocation, should not be studied too deeply. But I do not want the parents to sin in the giving of their child if they dedicate him to me without his consent.

If a father or mother wishes to dedicate a son to my service, then well before the presentation they should say, 'I promise God that I will carefully watch and protect my son until the age of understanding. Then I will implore, ask and admonish him to stay loyal to God's service. If he agrees, I will deliver him speedily into service to God; but if he refuses his consent then I will not be held responsible in the eyes of the Lord.'

If his parents have guided the boy in this way up to the age of understanding, and if he nevertheless turns away and will not agree, then it will suffice that they have shown their willingness as well as they could. But without his consent they should not deliver him and

compel him to a servitude which they themselves are not willing to undergo or bring to completion.

17. Letter to Elisabeth of Schönau

Elisabeth of Schönau was a fellow visionary whose prophetic writings were sometimes associated with those of Hildegard. One important manuscript, for instance, which preserves the oldest version of Hildegard's songs, was written at Rupertsberg and sent by Hildegard to the friendly Cistercian monastery of Villers in Brabant.[1] *Its main contents are: (1) Hildegard's* Book of Life's Merits, *(2) Elisabeth of Schönau's* Book of the Ways of God, *(3) Hildegard's* Symphonia, *and (4) a short anonymous dialogue. Though influenced by Hildegard, Elisabeth differed in many ways from her: she was unable to write Latin, and so used the services of her brother, the priest Eckbert, to turn her dictated German into written Latin; her visions were experienced while she was in a trance; they show less evidence of the wide reading that characterizes Hildegard's work. In addition Elisabeth was far more ascetic than her mentor Hildegard (in this she might be compared to Hildegard's erstwhile guardian Jutta of Spanheim), and Hildegard warned her against the dangers of exaggerated austerity towards the body. In this particular letter, the warning to take care of the 'fragile vessel' is an implied rather than openly critical condemnation of excessive abstinence, within a letter which places its emphasis on the positive aspects of the creation of the world and the history of salvation.*

Hildegard to Elisabeth of Schönau, 1152–6 (Letter 201R)

I, a mere female and a fragile vessel, speak these things not from me but from the serene light. A human being is a vessel that God has built for himself and filled with his inspiration so that his works are perfected in it.[2] For God's activity is not like human activity, but in giving his command, all things are brought to perfection. Grasses, woods and trees appeared; the sun also came forth, as did the moon

and the stars in their various functions; the waters brought forth fishes and birds; herds and animals also rose up, which serve human beings as God so placed them.

But humanity alone did not acknowledge God. For when God gave great knowledge to the human being, the human being elevated himself in his soul and turned away from God. God so regarded the human being that he would perfect all his works in him. But the old deceiver tricked human beings and infected them with the crime of disobedience, by the delight of an unseasonable wind, so that they sought for more than they should have.

Ach! Weh![3] Then all the elements were folded in the alternation of light and darkness, as also was humanity through the transgression of God's commands. But God watered certain human beings so that humanity would not become a complete mockery.[4] So Abel was good, though Cain was a murderer. And many saw God's mysteries in the light, though others committed many sins, until that time came when the Word of God shone out, as is said: 'Thou art fairer than the children of men'.[5] Then the sun of justice[6] came forth and shone on human beings in their good works, both in faith and action, as the dawn first came forth and as the other hours of the day follow on until it is night. Therefore, daughter Elisabeth, the world is changing. It has grown tired in all the vigour of the virtues and powers, as at dawn, prime, terce and especially the sixth hour of the day.[7] But at this time, it is necessary that God should water certain human beings so that his instruments do not become idle.

Listen, O anxious daughter, because these people whom God has so filled with his inspiration sometimes become tired through the arrogant promptings of the ancient serpent. For when the same serpent sees an elegant gemstone, he soon hisses and says: 'What is this?' And he tires it out with the many afflictions of a mind longing to soar over the clouds as though they were gods,[8] as he once did.

Now listen again. Those who want to perfect the works of God should always attend to the fact that they are fragile vessels, for they are human beings, and they should look at what they are and what they will be. But they should leave heavenly things to the one

who is of heaven, for they are exiles and ignorant of heavenly things, singing the secrets of God[9] like a trumpet which only gives out a sound but does not work by itself, since it needs someone else to blow into it so that it will make a sound. But let the mild, the gentle, the poor and the needy put on the breastplate of faith,[10] as also the Lamb was their trumpet and they are now the sound; and in their characters they are like simple children. For God always scourges those who sing forth in his trumpet, employing his foresight in order that the fragile vessel will not perish, as it so pleases him.

Daughter, may God make you a mirror to life. But as for me, I remain in the meagreness of my own mind. I am very tired, anxious and fearful, at times sounding forth as the small sound of the trumpet from the Living Light. May God help me that I remain in his service.

18. Gertrud of Stahleck

On 26 May 1146, Eberhard, Provost of St Jakob in Bamberg, had been elected Bishop and at the end of that year consecrated by Pope Eugenius III. The new bishop had good relations with the Emperor Barbarossa and took part in his Italian expeditions. Gertrud of Stahleck was sister of King Conrad III and so Barbarossa s aunt. She and her husband Hermann of Stahleck, the Count Palatine, gave rich gifts to the Rupertsberg convent, and after the letters death in 1156 Gertrud became a nun and then abbess in the Cistercian convent of Wechterswinkel in the diocese of Würzburg. The situation was for various reasons unsuitable, and eventually, after Hildegard wrote to intervene on her behalf, Eberhard granted Gertrud the hospital of Bamberg cathedral seminary to use as a basis for a new foundation. Gertrud and the other nuns moved there in 1157 and established the site as the convent of St Theodore and St Mary in Bamberg. The happy outcome of the two letters here thus contrasts strikingly with Hildegard's unsuccessful attempts to retrieve Richardis of Stade five years before.

Hildegard to Eberhard, Bishop of Bamberg, 1157 [Letter 30]

A certain man rose at the dawning of the day and planted a vineyard. Afterwards, because of many disputes, he turned his attention further afield, and it was here that his hard work was completed. Now, father, look to your wandering daughter Gertrud, who was called from her own land like Abraham, who departed from his own country. She has given away all these things and bought a pearl.[1] But now her mind is stifled by great worries, like a grape in a wine-press. Help her therefore, as much as you can – for

the love of Him who was before creation and who fulfilled all things with his compassion – so that the vineyard within this daughter may never be destroyed!

Hildegard to the Nun Gertrud,[2] after 1161 [Letter 62R]

Daughter of God, in the pure knowledge of faith, hear these words spoken to you: 'the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land'.[3] This is the Son of God, who – against the laws of the flesh – was born from the wholeness of the earth, the flesh of the Virgin Mary. And the flowers of all the virtues came forth and the beauties of all the fragrances. For the garden of these virtues arose in the prodigal son, who, when he came to himself, ran to confess his sins to his father, that is, to the omnipotent Father. And his Father received him with the kiss of his Son's humanity.

When with our own will we give up the world for the love of God, then the voice of the turtledove is heard, for above all other birds the turtledove remains alone when she loses her mate. Dearest daughter, you also did this when you gave up the pomp of this world. How beautiful your shoes were, daughter of the king, when for the love of God you entered upon the strait and narrow path of the spiritual life! Therefore rejoice, daughter of Zion, for the Holy Spirit dwells in the middle of your heart.[4] Consider that your comforter created you 'as a lily among thorns',[5] although when you chose the spiritual life you still had the pomp and riches of this age, which the Son of God called thorns.[6] You also shone red like a rose of Jericho in the passion of your conversion to the spiritual life.

But now I have joy in you, because what I have heard and desired for you is now complete; you should rejoice with me too. And I hope with a true hope that you will become a wall decorated with precious stones and pearls,[7] and that you will earn the praises of the heavenly host. Rejoice and be glad in God, for you will live forever.

19. Letter to the Abbess of Bamberg

This letter, to an unknown abbess L. at the Abbey of St Theodore and St Mary at Bamberg, shows another side to Hildegard's views on education, discipline and the training of young oblates. It should be seen against the background of the Benedictine Rule, which regulated the communal life of the monastery, and on which Hildegard wrote a commentary. Chapter 5 of the Rule, for instance, states that 'the first degree of humility is obedience without delay. This is the virtue of those who hold nothing dearer to them than Christ.'[1]

Hildegard to the Abbess of Bamberg,[2] after 1157 [Letter 61R]

Mother, imagine a field in the fullness of fertility. Now if the man who has the field does not dig it and make it fruitful, then he is neglectful, because he does not work for his reward from the head of the household. Think who made the ox and the ass. God created them to serve human beings. So why does a man not work for his own benefit when we consider that he is wholly the handiwork of God and that God did not make him to be vain and useless?

For God made humanity like the firmament which bears the sun, moon and stars to shine their light on the whole of creation and to show the times and the seasons. But if they were all obscured by black clouds then creation would be afraid that its end was coming.

Daughter of God, know that you yourself are this field because you embrace the people with your benevolence so that they can receive your words and deeds. So don't avoid working with them and don't abandon them for lack of leisure time, since useless weeds will often grow wherever there is leisure. You should put before you

a vision of the firmament so that you do not hide the light of your reason behind black clouds of evil, as if you were barely alive.

Therefore you should restrain and discipline your daughters in all matters. Just as a young lad is scared of being beaten with a rod, so the one in authority must be feared by everyone. Do not be afraid of punishing them in this way, for in so doing you will increase your reward in the life everlasting, so that the breath of the Spirit may flow within you.

IN PRAISE OF CREATION

20. The Cosmic Egg (from *Scivias* I, 3)

A famous image in Hildegard's work is that of the 'cosmic egg', a survey of the cosmos which forms the third vision of the first book of Scivias. *This vision is descriptive, but also highly allegorical, and it is worth noting that although each detail of the description represents a physical object in Hildegard's universe, she also attaches a further significance to it in the life of faith and the events of history. In so doing she implies that human life and the universe are closely and inextricably connected, as microcosm and macrocosm. This ties in with her exalted view of the human being in* Scivias *I, 3, 17 (translated below), a characteristic attitude of the twelfth-century Renaissance.*

The cosmic egg

After these things I saw a huge form, rounded and shadowy, and shaped like an egg;[1] it was pointed at the top, wide in the middle and narrower at the bottom. Its outer layer consisted of an atmosphere of bright fire with a kind of dark membrane beneath it. And in that outer atmosphere there was a ball of red fire so large that all the huge form was lit up by it. Directly above the fireball was a vertical row of three lights which held it with their fire and energy and prevented it from falling.

At times the fireball rose upwards and was met by more fire, which caused it to shoot out great long flames. At times, however, the fireball moved downwards and encountered a region of great cold that caused it quickly to retract its flames.

From the outer atmosphere of fire, a wind blew storms. And from the dark membrane beneath, another wind raged with further storms which moved out in all directions on the globe. The dark membrane contained also a dark fire of such horror that I was unable to perceive it properly. The horror buffeted the dark membrane with a massive impact of sounds and storms and sharp stones great and small.[2] Whenever the noise arose it set in motion the layer of bright fire, winds and air, thus causing bolts of lightning to presage the sounds of thunder; for the fiery energy senses the first agitations of the thunder within it.

Below the dark layer, however, was the purest of ether with no membrane beneath it. Here also I saw a fireball, of great magnitude, filled with white-shining energy; it had two lights placed above it which held it and prevented it from passing beyond the circuit of its course. Situated everywhere throughout the ether were many bright spheres, into which the white fireball discharged its energy at regular intervals. It then rose up again to the red fireball where it recharged its fires and sent them forth again into the bright spheres. The ether also contained a wind, which poured out its storms and extended them all over the cosmos.

Beneath the ether I could see a layer of watery air, which had a white membrane beneath it. It spread out everywhere, giving off water to the whole of the world. At times it accumulated quickly and sent out a sudden fall of rain with a great crash. But when it spread gently it sent forth soft rain with only gentle agitation. But from it there came a wind and storms which spread all over the globe.

And in the middle of these elements there was a sandy ball of great size which was so surrounded by these elements that it could not move in any direction. However, when the winds collided with the elements, the force of their impact set the whole world in motion a little.

And I saw between the north and the east the likeness of a great mountain, which showed great areas of darkness towards the north

and a great light towards the east.[3] The darkness could not affect the light nor the light the darkness.

And again I heard a voice speaking to me from heaven.

1. *Invisible and eternal things are made known through visible and temporal things*

God, who created all things in his will, made them so that his name would be known and honoured. Through his creation he not only makes known visible and temporal things but also invisible and eternal things.[4] Such matters are shown in this vision which you see.

2. *The significance of the cosmos made in the likeness of an egg*

'I saw a huge form, rounded and shadowy, and shaped like an egg; it was pointed at the top, wide in the middle and narrower at the bottom.' The large form which you see represents, on the level of faith, the omnipotent God, incomprehensible in his majesty, inconceivable in his mysteries, the hope of all the faithful. It was pointed at the top because at first human activity was naïve and simple; later in the Old and New Testaments it became more wide-ranging; finally towards the end of the world it is to endure the narrow constriction of many troubles.

4. *The position of the sun and the three stars and their significance*

'And in that outer atmosphere there was a ball of red fire so large that all the huge form was lit up by it.' With the splendour of his brightness he shows that in God the Father is his ineffable firstborn son, the Sun of Justice, shining with burning love in such glory that all of creation was lit up by the brightness of his light.

'Directly above the fireball was a vertical row of three lights which held it with their fire and energy and prevented it from falling.' The function of the three lights is to show that when God's Son descended from heaven to earth leaving the angels above him,

he made known the things of the heavens to human beings existing in soul and body. By following his light they glorify him, casting all harmful error from them. They praise him as the true Son of God, who became incarnate of the true Maiden when the angel proclaimed him to them and when the human being – alive in soul and body – received him with faith and joy.

16. *The sandy ball of the earth and its significance*

'And in the middle of these elements there was a sandy ball of great size which was so surrounded by these elements that it could not move in any direction.' The ball represents humanity endowed with the gift of profound contemplation, made in a wonderful manner from the clay of the earth, and living in the strength of the creatures of God. Human beings are so surrounded by the power of God's created things that they cannot be separated from them. The elements of the world are thus created for human beings and render them their service.[5] In the midst of the elements is the human being presiding over them by divine ordinance. As David says, inspired by God:

17. *The words of David*

'Thou hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands.'[6] This means that you, O God, have wonderfully created all things. You have crowned the human being with the splendid golden crown of the understanding and clothed him with the honourable robe of visible beauty. You have made him the ruler over your exalted and perfect works, which you have distributed justly and well throughout your creation. Over all other creatures you have granted the human being high worth and admirable dignity.

18. *The meaning of the earthquake*

You see in the vision that opposing winds come together, and the force of their impact sets the whole globe in motion a little. For when at any given time the creatures of God become involved with the knowledge of their Creator, so that with the sounding of the words one wonder follows another, then human beings, struck by the grandeur of this miracle, tremble in body and soul, pondering, in their wonder at this miracle, their own weakness and frailty.

21. The Cosmos (from *Causes and Cures* I)

Causes and Cures, *otherwise known as* The Book of Compound Medicine, *deals with the creation of the cosmos, the human body, health and the cure of ailments. The opening chapter is particularly interesting for its discussion, in a 'non-prophetic' style, of matters usually treated by Hildegard in the visions of her more widely read trilogy. Though still rooted in the theology of its time*, Causes and Cures *is also more openly influenced by the philosophical and scientific ideas of the twelfth century. Its factual style mirrors the subject-matter, the sentence structure is simpler and clearer, and there is less frequent resort to the vivid, but also mysterious, allegorical imagery which figures in the passages on the cosmic egg from* Scivias (*20*).

The creation of the world

God was, before the creation of the world, without beginning, because he is. He was and is always light and glory, and he was always life.[1] So when God wished to create the world, he made it from nothing, because all the material of the world was in his will.

Matter

When God's will revealed itself, in order to create the whole of reality, just as he wished, the material of the world came out of his will still unformed[2] and like a dark mass.

The creation of the angels

And the Father's word sounded forth: 'Let there be light',[3] and immediately everything was light and the world was full of angels

shining with light. For the words ‘Let there be light’ did not signify individual lights, but rather the specially formed light which is the angels. But when he said: ‘Let there be lights’, this signifies the light of the air which we can see.[4]

The fall of Lucifer[5]

Lucifer however saw in the North an empty region not yet filled with creative activity and he intended to set up his seat there, and make more and greater works than God himself, since he did not know of God’s intention to create other creatures. He had not seen the face of the Father; he did not know of his power, nor had he tasted his goodness; therefore, before he had experienced any of these things, he tried to rebel against God. But God had not yet made known these things; he kept them hidden, just as a strong and powerful man will do when he conceals his strength from the others who do not yet know him – until he sees what they think of him and what actions they intend to begin and carry out.

But because Lucifer in his perverse will wished to elevate himself to nothingness, all that he wished to create was indeed nothing, and he fell into it and could not stand since he had no ground beneath him. Indeed he had no height above him and no depth below him to prevent him from falling. But now, as he stretched forth to grasp at nothing, the inception of this action of stretching forth produced evil, and the evil caught fire within itself, although without any light or brightness, and inflamed by his envy of God,[6] and it rotated like a wheel turned only by itself, and showed burning darkness within itself.

In this way, good and evil fell apart: good did not touch evil, nor evil good. But God himself remained whole and perfect like a wheel; he remained the Father in goodness, because his fatherhood is full of his goodness. Therefore his fatherhood is very just and fully good, and at once both strong and stable; and seen in this measure, it is conceived as a wheel. Now this wheel is in some place, and there is something inside the wheel. If this wheel had just an outer rim, it

would be empty. And if an outsider happened to come and wanted to work there, then he would not be able to, for two craftsmen cannot work at the same time on one single wheel.

Human creature, take a careful look at humankind! Each human being contains heaven and earth and all of creation and yet remains one whole figure, and within every human being all things lie concealed.[7]

On the fatherhood

The fatherhood is like this. The circle of the wheel is the fatherhood; the fullness of the wheel is the divinity. All things originate there, and without it there would be no Creator. Lucifer on the other hand lacks this wholeness: he is scattered and divided, because he wished to be what he could not be.

For when God created the world, he had already determined by his ancient counsel that he would become a man.[8]

The creation of the soul

And when he created the light, which was winged and could fly everywhere, he determined in the same ancient counsel that he would give a corporeal mass to the spiritual life, which is the breath of life, and give it a shape formed from the clay of the earth, which does not have the ability to fly or breathe or raise itself above itself; therefore it would be all the more bound down and it would gaze all the more attentively towards God. And so the ancient serpent had such hatred for that bond, because this very human creature which had become so weighed down by its corporeality was destined nevertheless, by means of its rationality, to raise itself to the godhead.

On the elements and the firmament

God also created the elements of the cosmos. All the elements are present in human beings and each human being is able to function through the elements, which are fire, air, water and earth. These four basic substances are interwoven and connected to such an extent that none of them can be separated from the others; and they are so closely interconnected that they are known as the firmament.

The sun and the stars

Within this structure, the sun is almost supreme, and it sends its fire and splendour over everything. Grouped around the sun are various stars of such strength and brightness that they are like mountains in the way they reach down through the firmament to the earth, and the closer they are to the earth, the brighter they seem to be. Round the sun also there are other stars of lesser strength and brightness; these are like low valleys in comparison to the majesty of those other luminaries and they therefore appear smaller.

Storms

If there is a greater heat and fervour of fire in the ether, then this heat causes a sudden rise and dangerous flooding of the waters, which it sends upon the earth, causing cloudbursts and storms. It is like the pot over a hot fire suddenly coming to the boil and frothing over. Frequently these storms occur according to God's judgement because of wickedness, or because of evil deeds perpetrated by men, or as portents of future dangers such as war, famine, or sudden death. The reason is that all our actions affect the elements and are in turn disturbed and influenced by the elements. But if there is a lesser heat and fervour of fire in the ether, then it causes a much smaller rise and flooding of the waters; this is like a pot over a small fire which only produces a bare minimum of froth and bubbles. But when the air is temperate with fire and water then it sends forth moderate weather, just as a pan placed over a moderate fire gives off a mild heat. But when the sun rises up so that its fire burns

vigorously in the height of the heavens, then also the air sometimes becomes dry and arid from the heat of the sun, and the fire of the sun sometimes affects the fire of the thunderstorm.

On thunderstorms

For in the thunder is the fire of judgement where there is both stench and cold.[9] And whenever the fire of the thunder is affected by the fire of the sun it becomes agitated and sends out mild flashes of lightning.

Lightning

Some mild murmurings of thunder follow, and then they cease, like a man who is moved to anger but does not vent it fully because he checks and restrains it. Sometimes, however, the fire of the thunder is stirred by the great heat of the sun until it becomes so agitated that it sends out large and dangerous bolts of lightning, and raises its voice loudly, like a man who is moved to great anger and expresses it in violent behaviour. Again on occasions when the upper fire of the thunder is touched by the fire of the sun, the cold which is in the thunder unites in one place, just as water accumulates in one place as ice, and the cold transmits hail to the clouds, and the clouds gather it up and disperse it and send it out onto the earth.

Hail

Hail is like the eye of the thunder. But when the sun becomes lower in winter, it does not transfer its fire to the height of the heavens, and it burns more when it is below the earth than it does above the earth, and it does not burn any longer in the height of the heavens.

The waters

And so the waters which are in the upper reaches of the sky become like dust scattered by the cold, and they cause snow to fall.

Rain

But when they warm up and become milder again, they cause rain to fall, and when the sun in the meantime now manifests neither too much heat nor too much cold then it sometimes sends forth mild rain, just as someone will often shed tears of joy when they are happy.

Winds

The four cardinal winds support the firmament below and above the level of the sun. They hold together the whole cosmos from the lower to the upper part of the firmament and cover it like a cloak. The east wind embraces the air and dispenses gentle moisture to the dry regions. The west wind mingles with the floating clouds, to sustain the waters and prevent them from bursting forth. The south wind keeps the fire under its control and prevents it from burning up everything. The north wind controls the outer areas of darkness, so that they do not exceed their measure. These four winds are the wings of the power of God.[10] If they were all set in motion at the same time they would confuse the elements and break apart; they would agitate the sea and dry up all the waters.

The judgement of God

But now they are securely locked by the keys of God's majesty so that the elements are held in moderation in order that they will not cause harm to anyone, except at the end of the world when all things will be purified. Afterwards they will bring their song back into harmony.[11] And no created being can exist that consists of only one property; rather it must demonstrate at least several such properties.

On nothingness

But nothingness has no particular property from which it might derive its existence; it is therefore quite simply nothing. For this reason, as soon as the other creatures voluntarily associate themselves with nothingness then they lose their own properties and also come to nothing.

On the firmament and winds

The firmament has fire, sun, moon, stars and winds; it exists through all these things together and by their properties it is strengthened so that it does not fall apart. Just as the soul holds the whole of the human body, so also the winds hold together all of the firmament to prevent it from disintegrating. And they are invisible, just as the soul is invisible emerging from the mystery of God. And like the house that will not stand without cornerstones, so also the firmament, earth, abyss and the whole world with all its components cannot exist without these winds, because they bring all these things together and hold them together. The whole world would break up and fall apart if these winds did not exist; in the same way the human body would fall apart if it did not have its bones. The main east wind holds together all the eastern region; the main west wind holds together all the western region; the main south wind holds together all the southern region; and the main north wind holds together all the northern region.

The collateral winds

Each of these main winds has two weaker winds assisting it like two arms, into which at times it breathes its strength. These weaker winds have the same nature as that possessed by the main winds. Each of the inferior winds imitates the main wind as though it were its head (although with far less strength) in that the inferior winds have the same path as the main wind, just as the two ears have the same path for a sound in the head. And when they are agitated by a

higher command, they receive their breath and strength from the main winds. In such instances they are agitated so much that they produce a great deal of noise and dangerous collisions, in the same way as bad humours cause dangerous disturbances in human beings when they cast them into illness.[12]

From the beginning of the world, the main winds have never been fully agitated to their full strength, nor will they be so moved until the last day. But then they will reveal their strength and send forth the fullness of their blasts; because of their force and collisions, the clouds will be broken up and the higher firmaments will be folded up and torn apart, just as the human body is broken and its limbs scattered when the soul is released and departs from its body.

The east wind has two wings through which it attracts the globe of the sun to itself. In this way one wing contains the course of the sun from the heights to the depths, and the other wing runs towards the sun so that it is an obstacle to it to prevent it from moving in another direction from where it was intended to move. And this wind brings all kinds of moisture and brings about all kinds of germinations.

The west wind could be compared to a mouth to convey and dispense all the waters, so that it divides and disperses all the waters onto their right paths in order that no water may rise above the other but will run its course correctly. In fact this wind has power over the air which bears the waters. It drives out all greenness and anything with which it comes into contact.

The south wind is like a kind of iron rod with three branches at the top and a sharp point at the bottom. Its strength is like steel so strong that it can restrain both the firmament and the abyss. For just as steel overcomes and supersedes all other metals, and just as the heart strengthens the human being, so the strength of this wind contains the firmament and the abyss of this region so that it does not collapse.

And at the top it has three strengths like three branches, one of which tempers the sun as it rises, another suppresses the sun's heat

in the middle of the day, while a third cools the sun's heat as it sets; in this way it does not exceed its normal function in those regions. It is sharply pointed at the bottom because its strength is also fixed in the abyss so that the moisture and the cold do not rise up beyond all moderation.

The same wind brings all growing things to maturity: it causes the ripening of the leaves in the trees and the grass, the crops, the apples and all the other fruits of the earth.

The north wind is like four pillars which hold together all the firmament and all the abyss. When it removes its pillars on the last day then the firmament will fold up on itself and fall into the abyss. These four pillars contain the four elements, which are closely connected, confined and as it were supported by the pillars so that they do not fall. When on the last day this wind moves the four pillars by its strength, then the firmament will be folded like a book. And this wind is cold, and bears the cold with it. Using its cold it constrains all things and at the same time holds them together so that they do not fall apart.

The sun

And the sun, as was said before, is positioned at the highest point and so to speak in the middle of the firmament; and it is fiery and airy. It holds with its fire every support and foundation of the firmament -along with the air, the luminaries, the stars and clouds – to prevent them from falling and dispersing. The sun also strengthens the ether.

When the sun stands at the height of the firmament, fire and energy run to it and act as its servants. The sun strengthens all the firmament and scatters its brightness over the whole of the earth, causing it to bring forth green vigour of fruitfulness. During this period, the days are long because the sun is running its course at the height of the firmament, and it is summer. But when the sun drops closer to the earth, the cold of the earth runs to it from the water and causes all green things to dry up. And because the sun has

dropped closer to the earth, the days are short, and it is winter. Also the sun's heat is greater in winter below the earth than it is above it;[13] and if the cold were as great below as above, or if in summer the heat were the same below the earth as above, then the earth would break apart from immoderation.[14] When winter is approaching, the tempests rise from the water and darken the light of the sun; the days will therefore be darker. But when summer is approaching, the storms fall below the earth, so that the days are often beautiful and bright because summer is here. The sun is whole and full in its orbit and does not fade; and it sends its light to the moon when it moves towards it just as a man sends his seed into a woman.

The moon

The moon is made of fire and thin air; it is situated in the air and has its habitat there, and the air is strengthened by the moon. After it has waned, the moon passes beneath the sun, from which a sphere is extended that attracts the moon closer to it, like a loadstone attracting iron to it.[15] The sun then kindles fire in the moon, although the other planets and stars and the air and other heavenly bodies surrounding the moon burn towards it and contribute to the process of ignition. After it has been lit, the moon gradually waxes to its fullness like fire wood or a burning house, gradually catching fire until all of it is in flames. In the meantime, as the moon waxes to fullness, the sun strengthens the higher parts of the firmament, never ceasing from its task. The sun precedes and accompanies the day because the higher firmament is bright, while the moon precedes and accompanies the night because the earth is dark.[16] After the moon is full so that it becomes like a pregnant woman, it sends forth its light and passes it on to the stars; in this way the stars are made brighter.

Dew

Then also, from the same heat, the stars heat the air and strengthen it, and the warm air gives off it moisture as dew, sends it onto the earth and so makes it fertile. And so the earth is watered and produces fruits. For while the moon is emptying itself and so passing its light to the stars, and while it is waxing to fullness when kindled by the sun, the stars gradually send out their light and warmth, which they have received from the moon, into the air in order to warm it and strengthen it. The air exudes its moisture onto the earth in order to make it fertile, so that when the moon is full again, the stars are again empty and ready to receive new light and heat from it. And when the moon wanes, the stars are full in order to strengthen the air and the earth. And the stars wane so that the moon will again be full.

The purification by the airs

But when the stars appear at night, then burning spheres and projectiles are sometimes seen flying in the air. The explanation is that the stars are sending their fire and energy into the air in order to strengthen it, and the air then makes the earth fruitful with its heat. Therefore also the air is often seen purging itself with the fire and heat of the stars so that its impurities fall from it like dregs.

The threads of the air

Similarly, when summer and winter separate so that either summer recedes and winter arrives or winter recedes and summer arrives, then a certain mixed substance appears, flying in the air, like a whiteness of threads, where the air is purifying itself. This descends to the earth owing to the collision of summer and winter, that is, when the two seasons come into conflict with each other.

Eclipses

Sometimes an eclipse of the moon is seen when the elements and the storms collide as though they had a conflict among them. On these occasions the moon is darkened by the storms for a period rather than waning or being extinguished. But the force of the moon is such that it can overcome these storms and send out its splendour again, because the force of the moon is greater than the force of these storms.

The five planets

There are also five planets, which have their light from the fire and from the ether; they are the support and strength of the firmament. They have their orbits in the heights and depths of the firmament where the sun's rays do not reach and where its splendour is hardly shown. Wherever they are situated and wherever they move to they also serve the sun in its orbit, restraining the sun's speed and causing its fire to diminish in such a way that because of the planets, the sun does not send out such burning heat as it would do if they did not restrain it. And just as the five senses of the human body hold it together and are its ornaments, so also the five planets contain the sun and are its beauty.

The retarding of the firmament

The firmament revolves at great speed, and the sun – with the other planets – moves a little more slowly in the opposite direction and thus restrains its speed, because, if the sun did not restrain it and slow it down, or if the sun – with the other planets – moved in the opposite direction to the firmament *at the same speed* as it actually revolves, then all things would be thrown into disorder and the whole of the firmament would collapse. If the firmament were motionless and did not turn, then the sun would have to stay above the earth for almost the whole of the summer without its becoming night and stay below the earth for almost the whole of the winter without its becoming day. But the firmament turns in such a manner

that while it moves in opposition to the sun and the sun in opposition to it, it is rapidly thickened and strengthened by the heat of the sun, for the sun moves through the whole of the firmament and pervades and penetrates it with its fire. Before the fall of Adam, the firmament was motionless and did not turn, but after his fall it began to move and revolve. However, after the last day it will stay motionless just as it was at the first creation before Adam. Now, however, it revolves for a reason: so that it is confirmed and strengthened by the sun, moon, and stars, for if it stood still it would quickly soften, turn liquid, and flow away in all directions. Also, because it revolves gradually it is able to purify the elements, and this purification is what we see as black clouds bearing water; just as water placed in a pot over a fire and brought to the boil throws up its froth and bubbles and so has a cleaning effect.

The music of the firmament

In its revolving the firmament emits marvellous sounds, which we nevertheless cannot hear because of its great height and expanse; likewise a millwheel or cartwheel gives off sounds when it turns. But the firmament is at such a height and expanse above the earth so that it does not destroy the people and animals upon the earth; therefore it is far enough away, for if it were any nearer the humans and animals would perish by the fire and winds and by the water and the clouds. As body and soul are one and support each other, in the same way the planets with the firmament confirm each other and strengthen each other. And like the soul that enlivens and strengthens the body, the sun – with the moon and the other stars – warms and strengthens the firmament with its fire. Thus the firmament is like a human head; the sun, moon and stars are the eyes; the air is our sense of hearing, the winds our sense of smell, the dew our taste; the sides of the cosmos are like our arms and our sense of touch. And the other creatures that are in the world are like our stomach, but the earth is our heart. As the heart holds the body together from top to bottom so the earth is a secure land for the

waters on its surface and a firm resistance to the waters beneath the earth to prevent them from wrongly breaking out.

22. Gemstones (from *Physica* IV)

The Book of Gemstones *is part IV of* Physica, *or* The Book of Simple Medicine, *a compendium of knowledge on herbs, trees, animals, gemstones, metals and rivers, in each case showing the uses of these natural objects for human health and well-being. In this respect it follows a tradition that goes back to Greek and Roman writers such as Dioscorides and Pliny. In the extracts here we are given information on the occurrence of particular gems and how they can be used as medicine and food, sometimes accompanied by a prayer or charm in order to treat specific complaints and ailments. Such illnesses are usually understood in terms of an imbalance of one of the four elements or 'humours' within the human body. The stones can be used to treat such imbalances because of specific proportions of the elements of fire and water that occur in the stones when they are formed. In some cases, Hildegard did not know, or chose to avoid, the Latin names of the complaints to be treated, and since her visionary writings came to her in Latin, these are some of the few times in her work when she resorts to her vernacular German in order to clarify her meaning.*

Preface

All gemstones contain energy and moisture. They terrify the devil, who hates and despises them because he remembered that their beauty appeared in him before he fell from the glory which God had given him, and also because some precious stones are created from the fire and energy in which he himself has his punishments. It was in fact by fire that the devil was defeated, through God's will, and he fell into fire, just as he is also defeated by the fire of the Holy Spirit whenever people are rescued from the devil's jaws through the inspiring breath of the Holy Spirit.

Precious stones and jewels have their origin in the East, and in those areas where the heat of the sun is particularly strong. The mountains that occur in such areas have a great heat, like fire, which comes from the heat of the sun; similarly the rivers that flow in these regions are always boiling hot, due to the same great heat of the sun. Accordingly, when at times the rivers flood and break their banks, increasing in volume and rising up to the mountains that are burning with the great heat of the sun, and when these come into contact with the rivers, then, in those places where the water makes contact with the fire, they throw up a kind of foam, in other words they 'singelent', that is, send out spray, just as a burning piece of iron or stone does when water is poured on it. And so the foam hangs in those places like 'glitten' or glue, and within three or four days hardens into stone. When the flood of waters has ceased and the waters have resumed their normal courses, then the drops of foam, which remain hanging at various locations in the mountains, are dried by the heat of the sun according to the various hours of the day and their corresponding temperatures. The stones therefore assume their colours and powers according to the temperature of the hour of the day at which they are formed, and once they have dried and hardened into precious stones, they drop like scales from their locations and fall into the sand. And when the rivers rise again in flood, they carry away the gemstones and deposit them in different regions, where eventually they are found by human beings. Owing to the many gemstones which they bring forth in this way, these mountains shine as bright as day.

In this way, then, precious stones are made out of fire and water; they therefore contain energy and moisture within them and they have many powerful qualities and effects, so that many actions can be carried out with them. These actions are nevertheless good and honest and useful to human beings, and not works of seduction, fornication, adultery, hostility, murder and the like, which are vices in opposition to human beings. For it is the nature of precious stones to seek the honest and useful and reject the evil and false in human beings, in the same way that the virtues throw off the vices, and in

the same way that it is impossible for the vices to act in conjunction with the virtues.

There are other kinds of gemstones that do not originate in the mountains in the manner just described, but are produced from various other useless substances. Through these stones both good and evil can be done, according to their natures, and as God allows it. God in fact gave the first angel beauty as of precious stones which Lucifer saw shining brightly in the divine mirror, and from these he received his knowledge, and in them he realized that God wished to carry out many marvels. Then his mind was raised in pride, because the beauty of the stones, which was in him, was shining out in God. He thought he could be the equal of God and more, and so his brightness was extinguished. But just as God raised Adam to a better part, so God allowed neither the beauty nor the virtue of the stones to perish, for he wished them to remain in the earth in honour and blessing, and for medicinal use.

1. *Smaragdus*

Smaragdus grows in the early morning at the rising of the sun, when the sun is powerfully placed in its circuit for the perfection of its journey, and when the grasses and greenness of the earth flourish at their best, for the air at that time is still cold but the sun already warm; and at that time the herbs absorb the greenness as powerfully as a lamb sucking its milk so that the heat of the day is barely enough to ripen and nourish the greenness of the day and make the plants fertile enough for the producing of fruit.

Smaragdus is therefore effective against all human weaknesses and infirmities, because it is brought forth by the sun and because all its material springs from the greenness of the air. So for a pain in the heart, stomach, or side, carry smaragdus about you to warm the flesh of your body, and it will feel better. But if the illness strikes a person so suddenly that they can barely withstand its attack, then they should immediately put the smaragdus in their mouth, so that it is moistened with saliva, and so that the saliva is warmed by the

gemstone, and they should breathe in and out repeatedly. Then without doubt the sudden onsets of that illness will cease.

And if someone falls in a fit of epilepsy, then – right where they are lying – place a piece of smaragdus in their mouth, and their spirit will revive. And after they have got up again and taken the stone from their mouth, they should look at it attentively and say:

> 'As the Spirit of the Lord has fulfilled the circle of the earth,
> So may the house of my body be filled with his grace
> That it may never again be afflicted.'

They should repeat this again and again on the following days in the mornings, and they will be cured. But they should take care always to have the same stone about them and look at it every day in the early morning, and while they are looking at it they should say the words given, and in this way they will be healed.

If you suffer from headache, place the stone in your mouth and warm it with your breath until it is moistened from your breathing, and stroke your temples and forehead with the wet stone; next, place the stone in your mouth and keep it there for a short hour, and you will feel better.

For someone with too much 'flecma' and too much saliva: first, heat up some strong wine; place a linen cloth over a bowl, put a smaragdus stone on the cloth and pour the heated wine over the stone so that the wine strains through the cloth; repeat several times as for the preparation of a solution. Mix this wine with bean flour and eat often, and drink the prepared wine frequently. This will clear the brain and reduce the 'flecma' and saliva within it.

For an attack of gnawing worms: place a linen cloth over the ulcer with a smaragdus stone and tie other pieces of linen over it, as for the treatment of a swelling. The reason this should be done is to warm the stone. Continue to do it for three days until the worms die.

2. *Hyacinth*

Hyacinth has its origins in fire at the first hour of the day when the air is moderately warm, and thus has more air than fire. It therefore senses the air and it changes according to the warmth of the air. Nevertheless it is also fire, because it is generated from fire.

For someone suffering weakness of the eyes, or whose vision is turbid, or whose eyes 'swerent' [hurt] – hold up the 'jachant' [hyacinth] to the sun and it will at once recall its generation from fire and warm up quickly. Moisten it immediately in a little saliva and as quickly as possible place it over the eyes so that they are warmed by it. Repeat frequently and the eyes will become clear and healthy.

For anyone who is 'bezaubert' [bewitched] by fantasms or magic words and has gone out of their mind:[1] take a warm loaf of fine wheat and cut the shape of a cross through its top crust, but without breaking the loaf into pieces; draw the stone through the line of the cut on top and say:

> 'May God, who deprived the devil of every precious stone
> after he had broken his commandment,
> drive out from you, N.,
> all fantasms and all magic spells,
> and may he release you from all the pain of this madness.'

And again, drawing the stone transversely through the bread, say:

> 'Just as the splendour which the devil had
> was taken from him because of his transgression,
> so may this madness too,
> which oppresses you, N., through fantasms and through magic,
> be taken from you,
> and may it depart from you!'

Then, take the bread around the line of the cut through which you have passed the hyacinth and give it to the suffering person to eat. But if they cannot eat this wheaten bread because of the debility of their body, then take unleavened bread, that is 'derf brot', and give it to them to eat. But also pass the stone in cruciform through all the warm food that the patient eats, that is, through meat, 'warmuse'

[cooked vegetables] and their other food, and cut crosses in it and bless it with the aforesaid words; do this frequently, and the patient will be cured.

Also for anyone suffering pains in the heart: make the sign of the cross over their heart with the hyacinth and say the aforesaid words, and they will feel better.

3. *Onyx*

Onyx is warm and grows at the third hour of the day in thick cloud, when the sun burns powerfully but is covered by various rising clouds which prevent it from appearing through them because of their flood of waters. Thus the stone does not hold great heat of fire, but it has the warmth of the air, for its origin is in the root of the sun and the conglutination of various clouds. Onyx therefore has great virtues against illnesses arising in the air.

For dimness of the eyes and the like, or anything due to 'augswern' [complaint of the eyes], place good, pure wine in a bronze, copper, or iron receptacle, add onyx to the wine and 'beizze' [steep] it for either fifteen or thirty days. Then remove the stone, leaving the wine in the receptacle, and touch the eyes each night with a little of the wine; they will clear and become healthy.

For pains in the heart or sides, warm an onyx in your hands or close to your body, also taking wine again and heating it in a vessel over a fire; then remove the wine from the fire and hold the onyx over the steaming wine so that the sweat coming from the stone mingles with the wine. Finally put the stone in the hot wine and drink it as it is, and the heat in your heart or side will cease.

For a complaint of the stomach, prepare wine with onyx as described and then prepare a 'sufen' [soup] from the wine with hen's eggs and flour. Make and eat this frequently; it will purify your stomach and make you healthy. For a complaint of the spleen, cook the meat of a goat or lamb, put the cooked meat in the wine and onyx mixture as described above and eat the marinaded meat

like those dishes made by marinading in vinegar. Do this frequently; the spleen will heal and the swelling stop.

And for anyone who has a strong ‘fiber’ [fever] – place the onyx in vinegar for fifteen days. Remove the stone, and with this vinegar flavour and season all your food; eat it thus prepared, and the ‘fiber’ will stop and fade easily, because the good warmth of the onyx, mixed with the warmth of the vinegar, will drive out the noxious humours in which the fevers originate.

If you are oppressed by melancholy, focus your attention on the onyx and then put it immediately into your mouth; your mental depression will then cease.

And if ‘schelme’ [cattle sickness] starts attacking and killing your cows, heat some water in a vessel over a fire; remove from the fire, hold an onyx over the steaming water to allow the sweat from the onyx to mix with it, and then place the stone in the water for three days. Having removed the stone, give the cattle regular drinks of the water and sprinkle their feed with it; also, mix their bran with the water and offer it them to eat; do this frequently and they will feel better.

4. *Beryl*

Beryl is a warm gemstone which develops, between the third hour and midday, from the foam of water when the sun burns it severely. Its power is thus more from air and water than from fire, but nevertheless it has some of the properties of fire. And if a man has drunk or eaten poison, then he should ‘schabe’ [place] a little of the beryl in ‘queckbronen’ [spring water] or other water and drink it at once. Continue for five days drinking it once a day while fasting, and the poison will foam up through vomiting, or it will pass out of him through the rear.

Whoever keeps a piece of beryl constantly about them, and frequently takes it in their hand and frequently focusses on it, will not easily argue with other people, nor will they be ‘stridig’ [quarrelsome], but they will remain calm.

5. *Sardonyx*

Sardonyx is warm, and grows each day when the sixth hour has passed and when the first line of the ninth hour has gone by; at that time it is nourished by the pure sun, when the sun shines in its purity, because at that time the sun begins to cool down; it therefore contains more fire than air or water. It has strong powers in its nature and gives a certain virtue to the five human senses and is a remedy for them, because it is born in the purity of the sun, when no impurity appears in the brightness of the sun. When someone places the stone on their bare skin and also puts it often in their mouth so that their breath touches it, then takes it out and puts it back in again, then this will strengthen their intellect and knowledge, and all the senses of their body. Consequently great anger, stupidity and indiscipline will be taken from them, and because of their cleanness the devil will hate and flee them. And if by their nature a man or woman is burning in carnal desire, then he should place the sardonyx on his ‘lanchen’ [loins] and the woman should put it on her umbilicum, and they will have a remedy for their libido. But if someone has suffered an acute ‘sucht’ [attack of fever], as soon as they have sweated out the fever and are feeling better, then put the stone in a ring on their finger and they will not suffer any relapse of the ‘sucht’.

6. *Sapphire* [excerpt]

Sapphire is warm; it grows around the midday period, when the sun burns so vigorously in its heat that the air becomes to a certain extent hazy, and then the sun’s splendour from the great quantity of heat which it has at that period passes through the air less readily and its splendour at that period appears not as fully as it does when the air has cooled a little. Sapphire is therefore opaque and also more akin to fire than to air or water; and it signifies the full love of wisdom.

A person who has ‘vel’ in their eye should hold a sapphire in their hand and warm it there [or in a fire] and touch the ‘vel’ in his eye with the moist stone; continue to do this for three days every morning and night, and the ‘vel’ will diminish, and disappear. And if your eyes are red with pain and ‘seregent’ [hurt], or if your eyes are weak, then place the sapphire in your mouth while fasting and moisten it with saliva of the mouth and then take the same saliva that has moistened the stone on your finger and apply it round your eyes so that it also makes contact with the inside of your eyes; your eyes will heal and become clear.

And for a person who is completely ‘virgichtiget’ [suffering from gout] so that they cannot bear the great pressure in their head and in the rest of their body, have them put the stone in their mouth, and the ‘gicht’ will cease.

23. Songs from *Symphonia*

The Symphony of the Harmony of Celestial Revelations *was a collection of songs initially compiled in the middle period of Hildegard's career between the completion of* Scivias *in 1151 and the beginning of work on* The Book of Life's Merits *in 1158. Other songs were composed later and added to the collection, the fullest manuscript being that of the Riesenkodex of the 1180s. This translation of selected songs is based on the edition by Pudentiana Barth, M. Immaculata Ritscher and Joseph Schmidt-Görg,* Hildegard von Bingen. Lieder *(Salzburg 1969), which follows the oldest manuscript, a compilation of works by Hildegard and Elisabeth that was sent to the monastery of Villers during Hildegard's lifetime and is now preserved as Codex 9 of the library of the monastery of Dendermonde, in Belgium. For ease of comparison, the notes give the numbering of the songs in the edition by Barbara Newman*, Symphonia (*Ithaca, 1998*).

1. *O magne pater*. Antiphon[1]

O great Father, we are in great need.
Now therefore we entreat you, we entreat you through your Word
by which you have filled us with what we lacked.
May it please you, now, Father, as you see fit,
to look upon us through your helper, lest we perish
and your name is darkened within us.
For your name's sake, make haste to help us.

2. *O eterne deus*. Antiphon[2]

O Eternal God, now may it please you
to burn in love
so that we become the limbs

fashioned in the love you felt
when you begot your Son
at the first dawn
before all creation.
And consider this need which falls upon us,
take it from us for the sake of your Son,
and lead us to the joy of your salvation.

3. *Ave Maria*. Responsory[3]

Hail, Mary, author of life,
you have rebuilt our salvation.
You have shaken death
and destroyed the serpent
to which Eve rose up
with head held high in the breath of her pride.
You trampled it down
when you gave birth to the Son of God from heaven.
By the inspiration of the Spirit of God.

Sweet and loving Mother, we greet you,
You have granted the world your child sent from heaven,
By the inspiration of the Spirit of God.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.
By the inspiration of the Spirit of God.

4. *O clarissima mater*. Responsory[4]

O bright Mother of holy medicine,
You have poured out the ointment, through your holy Son,
on the grieving wounds of death
which Eve originated to the torment of souls.
You have destroyed death,
and built up life.
Pray for us to your Son,
O Mary, Star of the Sea.

O giver of life and splendour of joys
O sweetness of all delights, in you never fading!

Pray for us to your Son,
O Mary, Star of the Sea.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.
Pray for us to your Son,
O Mary, Star of the Sea.

5. *O splendidissima gemma.* Antiphon[5]

Most splendid of gemstones!
Bright beauty of the sun!
He poured upon you,
as a leaping fountain from the heart of the Father,
His unique and only Word,
through whom he made the primal matter of the world
which Eve the woman threw into confusion.
In your image, Father, this Word created the human being.
Therefore, Mary, you are the bright matter
through which the Word breathed all the virtues forth,
as once he led forth, in the primal matter of the world, the whole of creation.

6. *Hodie aperuit.* Antiphon[6]

Today is opened to us the closed gate
which the serpent stifled in a woman.
And there, in the dawn light shining:
the flower of the Virgin Mary!

7. *Quia ergo femina.* Antiphon[7]

Because a woman brought death
a bright Maiden overcame it,
and so the highest blessing
in all of creation
lies in the form of a woman,
since God has become man
in a sweet and blessed Virgin.

8. *Cum processit factura.* Antiphon[8]

When creation came forth from the finger of God
fashioned in God's image
created of mixed blood
along the exile-path of Adam's fall:
then the elements received
the joys of life.
O Mary, worthy of praise.
As heavens shine red
they sound forth your praise.

13. *O virga ac diadema*. Sequence[9]

O branch and diadem, in royal purple,
you are in your chamber, like a protective breastplate.

You blossom and flourish in a different manner from Adam,
who brought forth the human race.

Hail, hail,
from your womb a different life came forth
different from the life to which Adam exposed his children.

O flower, you did not blossom from the dew
nor from the drops of rain; the air did not soar above you,
instead the brightness of God brought you forth
as the noblest branch.

O branch, God foresaw
your blossoming on the first day of his creation.

From his Word he created
the golden material
O Maiden worthy of praise.

How great and powerful is the man's side,
out of which God brought forth the form of a woman,
he made her as the mirror of all his beauty,
as the loving embrace of all his creation.

And so the heavenly instruments sound in harmony,
and all the earth marvels that God loved you so much,

O Mary, worthy of praise.

How sorely we lament and mourn
that harshness of guilt came into a woman
through the counsel of the serpent.

For the woman that God had established as the mother of all
afflicted her heart with the wounds of ignorance
and gave to her offspring the fullness of suffering.

But, O Dawn, from your womb
a new sun came forth,
who wiped away all the sins of Eve.
Through you he brought forth a benediction greater by far
than all the harm ever afflicted by Eve on humanity.

Therefore, Saviour Maiden, you brought forth
a new light to the human race,
gather together the limbs of your Son
in heavenly harmony.

15. *Spiritus sanctus vivificans vita.* Antiphon[10]

Holy Spirit, quickening life,
moving all things, the root in all creation,
who washes all things of impurity,
removing sins and soothing wounds
who is shining light and laudable life,
wakening and rewakening all things.

16. *Caritas abundat.* Antiphon[11]

Love abounds in all things,
excels from the depths to beyond the stars,
is lovingly disposed to all things.
She has given the king on high
the kiss of peace.

17. *O gloriosissimi.* Antiphon[12]

Angels, living light most glorious!
Beneath the Godhead in burning desire
in the darkness and mystery of creation
you look on the eyes of your God
never taking your fill:
What glorious pleasures take shape within you
and remain intact from all the evil work
which first arose in your companion,
the angel of perdition,
who wished to soar
above the inward hidden pinnacle of God.
From there he fell, and plunged to his destruction;
and yet he delivered
the instruments of his fall
to the work of God's finger.

26. *O speculum columbe*. Antiphon for John the Evangelist[13]

Mirror of the dove in the chastest of figures,
you have seen the breadth of mystery
in the purest of wells.
A wondrous flower
never fading or falling,
planted by the divine gardener!
Sweetest repose, embracing the sun,
you are the beloved son of the Lamb,
in chosen friendship, you are the new branch.

27. *O dulcis electe*. Responsory for John the Evangelist[14]

Beloved chosen one,
you burn with fire, and shine forth as a root;
in the splendour of the Father
you illumined the mysteries,
you entered the chamber of chastity
in the golden city built by the King
when he received the sceptre of the regions:
Send us your help on our pilgrims' way.
You increased the rain
which those who went before you

caused to fall
on the greenness of the pastors of the Church.

Send us your help on our pilgrims' way.

58. *O vis aeternitatis*. Responsory[15]

Power of eternity, you who ordained all things in your heart,
Through your word all things were created, as you so willed.
This very word of yours took on the same bodily form
that came from Adam.
In so doing he freed our human bodies from the greatest of pain.

How great is the goodness of our Saviour
who liberated all things through his incarnation,
whom God breathed forth without the fetters of sin.
In so doing he freed our human bodies from the greatest of pain.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.
In so doing he freed our human bodies from the greatest of pain.

59. *O virtus sapientie*[16]

Power of Wisdom,
circling all things,
comprehending all things,
on one path, which has life.

Three wings:
one soars in the height,
one exudes from the earth,
one soars everywhere.
Praise to you, as befits you, Wisdom.

24. Two Christmas Homilies [Pitra (ed.), homilies IIi and IIii] [1]

In her commentaries, apparently designed as homilies on the readings of the Gospel at particular church services and festivals during the Christian year, Hildegard allowed full rein to her allegorical interests, often with bold and innovative interpretations. These two homilies for Christmas reveal a strong Platonic vein in her thinking. In the first, the literal events of Luke's Nativity narrative take on added significance when seen in the light of the events of creation and redemption. In the second, the events are internalized and interpreted in a new, psychological reading that complements the first. Both homilies illustrate the tendency in medieval reading to allow for different layers and levels of interpretation. The text does not have one but several meanings.

Sermon on the Nativity ofthe Lord. For the first mass[2] [Luke 2:1–14]

[1] *There went out a decree*, that is an ancient counsel,[3] *from Caesar Augustus*, i.e. from the heavenly Father, *that the whole world should be described* – that all of creation should issue forth.

[2] *This first description* – creation – was made *by Cyrinus, the governor of Syria*; that is, by the Father's Word, which was the head of the whole act of creation and which was to be made incarnate.

[3] *And all went to be enrolled, every one into his own city*. Every creature went to perfect its beginning according to its nature and according to the function for which it was made, whether for walking, swimming or flying.

[4] And *Joseph*, the human being, *also went up* to that height *from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth*. The human being 'went up' from all the other creatures because he was placed above them. And he went *into Judaea, to the city of David*, which means 'it comprehends all things', to the place called *Bethlehem*, which means 'rationality'; *because he was of the house and family of David*, in other words, because God had created him in his own image and likeness.

[5] *To register*. that is, to register the God from whom he came forth when he was created and to whom he returned when he had been redeemed. And he went up *with Mary his espoused wife*, i.e. with the rationality entrusted to him. In other words, the human being was able to use this gift of rationality to discern where he should listen out for God's command.

[6] *And it came to pass when they were there* – that is, when the human being had gained discretion in his rationality – *that her days were accomplished when she should be delivered*. It was then that the human being received God's command through his sense of hearing.

[7] And when she heard God's command *she brought forth her firstborn son*; that is to say, she brought forth an intention good in its first beginnings. *And she wrapped him in swaddling clothes*. in other words, she wrapped this good intention in true desires. *And she laid him in a manger.* she humbly submitted herself to good will. *Because there was no room for them in the inn*: because as yet there was no secret place of incipient evil.

[8] *And there were in the same region shepherds* – the mind's watchers in that region of self-knowledge – who *were keeping watch by night*, keeping watch, that is, against the night of the knowledge of evil, *over their flock*, i.e. over all their works.

[9] *And, behold, an angel of the Lord stood by them*, that is, the angelic guardian was present with them; therefore they came to know the angels. And *the brightness of God*, i.e. the gifts of God,

shone round about them in order that they might know good works. *And they feared with a great fear*, so that they would feel anxiety about what things should be done.

[10-11] *And the angel said to them*, showing them great honour in their fear, *'Fear not for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people*, to all just doers of good works in thought and deed. *For this day is born to you a Saviour*, in order that salvation may have its birth within you, *who is Christ the Lord*, for you are made in the image and likeness of God, *in the city of David*, so that your good deeds might be worked in great strength.'

[12] ''*And this shall be a sign unto you*, showing that these things are true. *You shall find the infant*, that is, the good intention, *wrapped in the swaddling clothes* of just desires, *and laid in the manger* of good will.'

[13] And suddenly, when the created human being was placed in Paradise, *there was with the angel* guardian *a multitude*, i.e. a great wonder in the heavenly host, *praising God* on account of the human being, because the divine works shone out in him and because rationality was active within him; for an angel is rational only in praising, whereas a human being is rational in both praise and action. The great multitude of the heavenly host was *praising God*, because the angels in seeing the human being came to know God more!

[14] They sang *Glory to God in the highest*, because God is glorious in the heights with the angels, *and on earth peace* – given in heaven – *to men of good will*, because, before the fall, Adam was in good will.

Another Reading [Luke 2:1–14]

[1] There went out *a decree*, that is something created, *from Caesar Augustus*, that is by its own will, *that the whole world should be described* – that it should be extended throughout the whole body.

[2] *This first description* – that is, this first extension – was made by *Cyrinus, the governor of Syria*; that is, by the physical appetite.

[3] And all the virtues and the vices went to be *enrolled, every one into his own city*, i.e. each being directed to its own function.

[4] And Joseph, that is, 'good desire', also went up from *Galilee*, which means 'habit'. And he went out of the city of *Nazareth*, i.e. the 'cultivation' that habit has gained through rationality. Then he went *into Judaea*, on 'the strait way of the knowledge of God', *to the city of David*, which is called *Bethlehem*, i.e. 'salvation of the soul', because he was *of the house*, i.e. part of creation, and *of the family of David*, i.e. knowing good and evil.

[5] The good desire was *to be registered with Mary his espoused wife who was with child*, that is, to be interpreted with love and conjoined to give birth to the virtues.

[6] *And it came to pass that when they were there her days were accomplished when she should be delivered* – it came to pass that when the good desire had thus turned to love, the days were accomplished when the splendour of good works should appear.

[7] And she brought forth *her firstborn son* – obedience, the first virtue – and she wrapped him in the swaddling clothes of her embraces. And she laid him in a *manger* of humility because there was no room for them in the *inn*, i.e. in the place of vanity.

[8] *And there were in the same region shepherds* – the shepherds are the anxiety which appears in that same will to do good deeds, *abiding in the field*, watching in abstinence, *and keeping watch*, i.e. with prayer and vigil, *by night*, the time when the human beings turn from their sins, *over their flock*, i.e. over their good works in order that they might preserve them.

[9] *And, behold, an angel of the Lord*, representing the grace of God, *stood by them,* and enclosed them. *And the brightness of God*, i.e.

God's help, *shone round about them* and sustained them. *And they feared with a great fear*, because they are still in fear as to how they are to overcome the devil.

[10] And the angel, that is the grace of God, said to them: *Fear not*, that is to say 'do not doubt', for, behold, I bring you good tidings *of great joy*, a great virtue in the breath of life, which shall be *to all people* because it is common to all human beings.

[11] *For this day is born to you a Saviour* – in you is born holy rationality, which is Christ the Lord coming from God, *in the city of David*, that is, in the bulwark of all holiness.

[12] *And this shall be a sign unto you* in a revelation: you shall find the infant – obedience – wrapped in the swaddling clothes of your embraces and laid in the manger of your humility.

[13-14] And *suddenly*, for it will be quickly, there was *with the angel*, i.e. with the grace of God, *a multitude of the heavenly army*, i.e. a multitude of virtues, praising God with the sweetest sound and saying: 'Glory to God *in the highest*', i.e. in the knowledge of men, for God is able to make all things and lead the sinner back to life. '*And on earth peace to men of good will*', because God has returned to the earth to deal with the adverse troubles of the vanities, so that people may have the peace and quiet of good will when they do good things freely and are not prevented by weakness. And God will be the peacemaker among human beings.

ALLEGORIES OF JUSTICE AND LOVE

25. The Iron Mountain (*Scivias* I, 1)

One of Hildegard's earliest visions – given prominence as the first text and illustration in Scivias *– depicts a bright figure seated on an iron mountain. On the literal level, it is a striking and often surreal picture, but it is also an allegory in which every detail has a corresponding meaning in the religious and moral life. As text and iconography make clear, what the picture represents is the divine figure enthroned above his kingdom. Other details add to the interpretation. At the foot of the mountain stand two further allegorical figures. The first is fear of the Lord', seen as a vaguely human form covered all over with the many eyes of discernment, an idea that derives from Proverbs 1:7, 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge… ' This is the sapiential side of Hildegard's teachings, which she was to develop in the rest of her writing career. The second figure is that of poverty of spirit', whose face cannot be seen because of the light pouring down on her head from the figure of God on the mountain. The picture thus graphically illustrates the idea from Christ's Sermon on the Mount: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven' (Matthew 5:3). This points to the ethically and socially engaged side of Hildegard's theology; again it is something that never leaves her, and it is still present at the end of her writing career some thirty years later.*

Two other aspects of the vision described below should be noted. First, there are the sparks, representing the virtues, a recurring motif in her work. Secondly, there are the two types of people in the mountain, who symbolize, morally, the weak and the strong. In the explanations that follow, justice and the practice of justice emerge as the main themes of

the vision, while in the opening words Hildegard's primary vocation as prophet and teacher is emphasized.

[*Scivias* I, i]

I saw the likeness of a great mountain the colour of iron, and on it sat a figure in great brightness, so bright that it dazzled my eyes. Light-filled shadows stretched out on either side: they were wings of astounding breadth and height. And before this figure, at the roots of the mountain, there stood an image covered with eyes, and because of the eyes I could not make out the human form beneath. And in front of her was the figure of a child dressed in a pale tunic and white shoes. I could not see her face because of the bright light pouring down on her head from the man seated on the mountain. But many living sparks sprang forth from the man on the mountain and hovered round these figures most pleasingly. In the mountain itself many small windows were visible, at which there appeared the faces of men, some pale, some pure.

And suddenly the man seated on the mountain called out in a loud and penetrating voice and said:

Human creature in your weakness, in the dust and ashes of the earth! Cry out and speak of the entry to lasting salvation, so that the people may be taught who see the inner pith of the meaning of the writings but will not speak or preach them! For they are lukewarm and sluggish in their keeping of God's justice. Unlock the mysteries which they have so fearfully and fruitlessly concealed in a hidden field.

Pour forth therefore in a fountain of abundance; stream out in your knowledge of mysteries so that those who wish to hurt you because of Eve's transgression will be struck by the force of your irrigating torrent.

For you do not receive this profound and penetrating discernment from a human being. Rather, you receive it from the heavenly and

awe-inspiring Judge on high, where this glory will shine forth with a clear bright radiance among the bearers of light.

Rise up, therefore, cry out and speak forth those things made known to you by the great strength of divine assistance. For the one who rules his creation with mercy and power pours out the brightness of heavenly enlightenment on those who fear him and serve him with love in a spirit of humility. And those who persevere on the way of justice he will lead to the joys of the eternal vision.

I. *The strength and stability of the eternal kingdom of God*

'I saw the likeness of a great mountain the colour of iron, and on it sat a figure in great brightness, so bright that it dazzled my eyes. Light-filled shadows stretched out on either side: they were wings of astounding breadth and height.'

The 'great iron mountain' which you see represents God's eternal kingdom. In its strength and stability it can never be brought down by change or mutability. The 'man seated in the bright light that dazzles your eyes' is the one who rules all the circle of the earth in the brightness of his unceasing glory. In his eternal divinity he can never be grasped by human understanding. The 'light-filled wings' are the soft and gentle protection, the blessed defence of warning and reproof, the just and pious demonstration of ineffable justice brought about by true equity.

2. *The fear of the Lord*

'And before this figure, at the roots of the mountain, there stood an image covered with eyes, and because of the eyes I could not make out the human form beneath.'

The 'image covered with eyes' represents fear of the Lord in the presence of God. She contemplates the kingdom of God in all humility. Covered with the discernment of good and fair intentions, she practises enthusiasm and constancy in human behaviour. And this is why you cannot see the human form beneath the cover of the

discerning eyes: because her sharp-sighted gaze dispels all the obliviousness to God's justice which human beings often feel in their jaded hearts. And her vigilance is such that it cannot be diverted by the weakness of mortal inquiry.

3. *The poor in spirit*

The fear of the Lord is followed by the poor in spirit: 'And in front of her was the figure of a child dressed in a pale tunic and white shoes.'

In the devotion of humility, poverty of spirit is held in place in her blessed state by fear of the Lord. And she does not care for the elation or leap of the heart; instead she loves simplicity and sobriety of mind. In the pale colour of her tunic, she attributes her just deeds to God and not to herself – hence the pale colour also of her worshipful subjection – and she follows faithfully in the bright footsteps of the Son of God.

'I could not see her face because of the bright light pouring down on her head from the man seated on the mountain.'

He who worthily rules the whole of creation floods the power and strength of that blessed state with such radiance of presence that you cannot grasp it with the weak eyes of mortal perception. For he who holds the riches of heaven subjected himself in humility to the state of poverty.

4. *How the virtues proceeding from God protect the God-fearing and the poor in spirit*

'But many living sparks sprang forth from the man on the mountain and hovered round these figures most pleasingly.'

Diverse and powerful virtues emerge like sparks of lightning from the all-powerful God. With their help and protection, they surround those who truly fear the Lord and those who truly love poverty of spirit. The virtues embrace them ardently and win them over.

5. *How people's motivations cannot be hidden from God's awareness*

'In the mountain itself many small windows were visible, at which there appeared the faces of men, some pale, some pure.'

The meaning is this: people's motivations cannot be concealed from the depth and profundity of God's acute awareness. All too often they themselves either reveal their lack of warmth or manifest their purity. In their hearts and actions, some tire themselves out and fall asleep in disgrace, while others spur themselves on and remain vigilant in great honour.

6. *Solomon on the same topic*

Solomon testifies in a similar way, according to my will, saying: 'He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand: but the hand of the diligent maketh rich.'[1]

This means that if people do not practise justice and if they refuse to stamp out evil or cancel their debts, they will become weak and poor. In their idleness they will remain apart from the marvellous workings of divine favour. But as for those who practise powerful works of salvation and run on the path of truth – they will reach the springing fountain of glory, from which they will gain the precious riches of earth and heaven!

26. The Man Looking East and South (from *The Book of Life's Merits* I)

The main focus of the six visions of The Book of Life's Merits *(1158–63) is the 'Man.' The full symbolic and allegorical significance of this figure is made clear as the author moves on to the explanation and exegesis of her vision in the second half of each vision (for an excerpt, see 28).*

Part One: The Man Looking East and South

And I saw[1] a Man of such stature that from the tops of the clouds in the sky he reached down into the abyss; so that from above his shoulders he was higher than the clouds in the bright ether, and from below his shoulders down to his thighs he was beneath the clouds in another white cloud; from his thighs to his knees he was in the earthly air, from his knees to the calves of his legs in the earth, and from his calves to the soles of his feet in the waters of the abyss (but in such a way that he also stood above the abyss). He had turned towards the East, so that he looked[2] both East and South.

Now his face shone with such splendour that I could not perfectly see it. The white cloud was near his mouth in the likeness of a trumpet, full of the rapid soundings of all musical sounds, and when the man blew a breath, it sent out three winds: one bore a cloud of fire; one bore a cloud of storms; one bore a cloud of light. And each cloud was supported by its wind.

While the wind bearing the cloud of fire remained before the man's face, the other two winds descended with their clouds to his chest, and there they expanded their breath outwards. But the wind

that had stayed before the man's face extended its cloud from the East to the South.

In the cloud of fire were myriads of fiery beings; and they were all one life, in one will and one conjunction. And in their presence a writing tablet[3] was laid out, filled with feathers. The tablet soared in the precepts of God when the precepts of God bore it aloft. And the knowledge of God[4] had inscribed hidden mysteries upon it which the myriads of beings observed with one unified devotion. And when they had studied what was written the divine virtue came upon them and like a single mighty trumpet they sounded forth with one sound[5] in all varieties of music.

Now the wind bearing the aforesaid storm cloud dispersed it from the South to the West, in length and breadth like a road greater than any human intellect could comprehend. And in the cloud were a great number of blessed beings; they all had the spirit of life in them and no one could possibly count them. Their voices were like the sound of many waters, and they said: 'We have our habitations, just as the maker of the wind desired; but when will we finally receive them? If we had them with us, we would rejoice more fully than we do now.'

But the aforementioned[6] multitude of beings in the aforesaid cloud of fire answered them in a voice of praise saying: 'When the Deity takes hold of his trumpet, he will send forth thunder, lightning, and flaming fire upon the earth. He will strike the fire contained within the sun, so that all the earth will be moved; all this will be when God chooses to reveal his great signs. Then, with the trumpet blast, he will call out to all the nations from all the varieties of the tongues of the earth; and in this way you will receive your habitations.'[7]

And the wind bearing the aforesaid cloud of light extended it from the East to the North. But an immense darkness of great density and horror came from the East and extended towards the cloud of light, yet because of that cloud of light it could advance no further. Sun and moon appeared in the cloud of light; in the sun was a lion, in the moon a goat.[8] And the sun was both above the heavens

and in the heavens, and it shone both on the earth and below the earth; and thus it went forth in its rising and thus returned in its setting. But when the sun went forth the lion went forth with it, and he seized great spoil; and when the sun returned, the lion returned with the sun and in the sun, and he roared out for his joy. Likewise the moon and with it the goat followed the sun in each stage of its rising and setting. Then the wind gave forth a blast and said: 'The woman will bear fruit, and the goat will wage war against the North.'

And there was in the aforementioned darkness a countless number of lost souls, who had turned away from the singing of the beings in the South, for they did not wish to be their companions. Their leader was called the 'misleader',[9] for they followed the deeds of the one who was struck down by Christ and no longer had any power. And listen! They all cried out in a mournful voice saying: 'Woe to that noxious and terrible work which fled from life and moves within us towards death!'

Next I saw a cloud coming from the North,[10] reaching towards the darkness. It was arid and joyless, for the sun had neither touched it nor shown itself to it. It was full of evil spirits which wandered back and forth within it scheming plots against humanity, yet they blushed for shame in the presence of the Man.

And I heard the ancient serpent[11] say to himself: 'I will prepare all my forces of strength and wage war against my enemies with all I can muster!'

And he sent forth from his mouth among humankind the froth of his many impurities, and with them his vices, and he inflated them with his great mockery, and he said: 'Ha! They call themselves suns for the light of their works, but I will turn them into noxious terrors of the night!'

And he blew out a poison cloud which covered all the earth like black smoke, and from it came a great roar, saying: 'Let no one honour a God they cannot see and know! How can they worship what they cannot know!'

In the black cloud I saw the images of many kinds of vices;[12] seven of which I considered, in the following manner.

27. The Seven Vices and Virtues (from *The Book of Life's Merits* I)

In the following psychomachia, or 'battle of the soul', the various vices and virtues are personified and endowed with characteristics based on aspects of the human, animal, plant, demonic or angelic spheres of life. They speak and act, and have different personalities, and in the subsequent exegesis they are given names, usually based on abstract nouns or concepts, such as the first vice, 'Love of the World', and his/her opponent, the virtue 'Heavenly Love' Unlike the mainstream tradition of the Psychomachia *of Prudentius, in which all the personifications are female, in Hildegard the gender of these figures is hinted at but not formally stated. In the case of the first image, it seems best, from the context of the description given, to picture the figure as a man, perhaps a medieval 'wild man' with some of the characteristics of the inhabitants of the margins of the world (Ethiopia was on the edge of medieval maps), as described for instance in such medieval texts as* The Wonders of the East[1] *or* Mandeville's Travels.

The Book of Life's Merits I

1. *The first figure* had the form of a man and the blackness of an Ethiopian, and he stood naked, grasping round a tree below the branches with his arms and his legs. The tree flourished with all kinds of blossom, and he gathered the flowers to him with his hands and said:

'I hold all the kingdoms of the world with all their flowers and adornments. So why dry up when I possess all power of greenness? Why live in senile old age, when I can flourish in youthfulness? Why keep in the dark the beautiful vision of the eyes? If I did that, I would blush for shame![2] Give me the beauty of this world, and I will hold it with joy! All other life is unknown to me! The fables I hear of it are meaningless!'

When he had said this, the aforesaid tree dried up to the roots and plunged into the darkness, and the figure fell with it.

2. And from the aforesaid storm-cloud I heard a voice respond to the first figure:[3]

'This is great foolishness, for you desire to have life in a spark in the ashes; and you do not seek that life which never fades with the beauty of youth, and never weakens in old age. You lack all light, you are in blackness and darkness, wound up in human self-will like a worm; you live for the moment, then dry up like hay! You fall into the lake of perdition, and there have your end with all you embrace, which in your present state you call your flowers!

'I am a column of celestial harmony; I direct all the joys of life. I do not scorn life, but I trample all hateful things, and I disparage you. For I am the mirror of all virtues, in which the faithful may see themselves clearly. But you run the paths of the night! Your hands are busy with failure!'

The second figure had the form of a hunting-dog, trained to course for his prey.[4] He stood on his hind legs, reaching up with his front

paws round an upright staff, and his tail wagged playfully as he said:

3. ‘What is happiness for a man and what moves him moderately to laughter? Is there not a beautiful breath in his soul and should he not be a harmony of sound? What is a man who is constantly preoccupied with mortality? A nobody! So let him be happy while he can be happy.’

4. And again from the storm-cloud I heard a voice[5] give a response to the image:

‘You criminal! You are like the wind blowing about in the squalid manners of playful men, but in your fickleness you are like the worms digging up the ground. For when people see you, they fall in with you, and you run to greet them like a dog; in this way you persuade them to want only what they desire. You proffer your useless and criminal words, and you strike a wound in the hearts of men. You frame your deeds according to the letter of the law, and so you catch men more easily.

‘But I am the belt of sanctity and the cloak of honesty. I am an honoured guest at the nuptials of the king. There I attend in joy and discipline, and there I appear in all the trappings of righteousness.’

The third figure resembled a man, except that he had a long crooked nose, his hands were the paws of a bear, and his feet were like the claws of a gryphon. He had black hair, and was dressed in pale clothing.[6]

5. He said: ‘It is better to be playful than sad. Play is not wickedness! Do not all who know God rejoice and sing? The heavens and all creation are full of joy; therefore I too will rejoice! If I appeared sad before my fellows, they would hate me and shun me. I will do no such thing! I will try the many kinds of play – may all have their joy with me! God created the air which carries sweet sounds to me, the air which brings me the greenness of flowers, the air where I feast on all the sights of my eyes! Why should I not

rejoice in all these things? Humans with animals and animals with humans; all of them play and amuse themselves together. This is as it should be!'

6. And again I heard the response of the voice from the storm-cloud:[7]

'You are idolatry, since you act in all things according to your self-will, and you will be a dead sound made by human hand. Your will is both human and animal since your behaviour is sometimes human, sometimes animal. But all your behaviour is based not on living but on dead creatures, since you reach out for what you desire, and you walk in the paths of whim and vanity.

'But I blush at all this, I hide under the wings of the cherubim; I learn the mysteries of God in the books and commandments of God, and in all heavenly matters I am vitality. For I see with the eyes of the innocent, and everywhere by the practice of honesty I discern the will of God, from which you flee in your unseeing ignorance!'

The fourth figure was like a dense cloud of smoke in the shape of a man, though it did not have any limbs of human form except for large black eyes that appeared within; it moved neither up nor down, nor from side to side, but remained in the aforesaid darkness, motionless.[8]

7. And it spoke:

'I have designed nothing and created nothing. So why should I labour for any good cause? Why tear myself to pieces?[9] I will do no such thing! I will concern myself with people only if they profit me. Let God who created everything decide and provide for everything! And if I make smooth-sounding talk, inquire into the affairs of others, how will it benefit me? I will do them no harm, but I won't do them any good! For if I had so much compassion in me that I could not get any rest, where would I be then? And what kind of life would I lead if I had to respond to every voice of happiness or sorrow? I only know myself: all the others should do the same!'

8. And again I heard the response of the voice from the aforementioned storm-cloud:[10]

‘You creature of stone! What are you saying? The plants and flowers proffer scents to other plants; the stone presents its moisture[11] to other stones; every creature extends embraces to its fellows. All creatures serve the human race; and in their service they generously provide humanity with good things. But you are not worthy of receiving even the form of a human being! All you have in you are cruel eyes with no mercy! You are a bitter cloud of smoke in the malignity of darkness!

‘But I am in the air and dew; I am sweet herb in all greenness. My heart is full, ready to grant any kind of assistance, for I was present in that first *Let there be* out of which all created things proceeded that now do service for humanity. But you remain out there, excluded!

‘With my eyes I survey all needs; I unite myself to them; I lead all the broken back to health; I am a healing balm for every pain. And all my sayings are fair and just. But you are quite simply bitter smoke!’

The fifth figure appeared to have a human head, except that his left ear was like the ear of a hare and so big that it covered the whole head.[12] The rest of his body resembled the body of a worm, a boneless creature wound up in its lair like an infant wrapped in cloths.

9. Trembling with fear, it spoke: ‘I will not cause injury to anyone, and in this way I will not become an exile without hope or consolation. For if I were to injure others, I would jeopardize my present standing and be without friends. I will honour the nobility and the rich, but I will care nothing for the saints or the poor, for they cannot bring me profit.

‘I wish to be peaceful to all, so that I will not perish. For if I fight with anyone, they will perhaps strike back; and if I do someone an injury, they will do me a greater one. As long as I am among people

I will remain at peace with them. And whether they do good or ill, I will remain silent. For it is better for me occasionally to lie and deceive rather than tell the truth; it is better also to gain rather than lose, and to flee the strong rather than fight against them. Where indeed would be the profit in starting something that I could not finish? The victorious and the wise make fun of me. But let them have what they have; for my part, I will have the house that I have chosen. Often those who speak the truth lose their possessions, and those who fight are sometimes killed.'

10. And again I heard the response of the voice from the storm-cloud:[13] 'In the first error of speaking against God you began to err, and you refused to follow justice; and thus in your trembling stupor you have wandered into exile, and thus in the unreliability of your favours you have deceived people. For you have no honesty about you. But I hold the sword of the powerful virtues of God and with it I cut away all injustice; and I will draw that same sword and strike you in the jaw! I will harden my heart against you, for you are ash among ashes; and whatever you desire and gather to yourself is mean and paltry. All life lying in ashes and all the empty vanities of this world is not what I want, but I desire to reach the springing source. For I fight against the ancient serpent, and I destroy all his spoils with the mystery of the scriptures of God, in which I always contend against the missile showers of the enemy; and so I remain, in the one true God.'

The sixth figure had the face of a man, except that his mouth was like the mouth of a scorpion and the white of his eyes stood out around his pupils; his arms also resembled human arms, but his crooked hands were long claws; he had the chest, stomach and back of a crab, and his feet and legs were like those of locusts and vipers. He stood entangled within the spokes of a mill-wheel with his hands grasping the upper spokes of the wheel and his feet resting on the lower spokes. There was no hair on his head, and his whole body was bare. But from his mouth he emitted many flames of fire like burning brands.[14]

11. And he said: ‘I trample and overthrow all that cause me harm. Should I merely tolerate any injury? What you do not wish to be done to you, do not do to me! Whoever does me harm I stab with my sword and strike with my clubs!’

12. And again I heard the response of the voice from the storm-cloud:[15] ‘I have sounded in the heights and touched the earth; I have exuded healing balm from the earth. But you are true deception! You are a drinker of blood! You are always of the North!

‘But I am a mild breeze of all greenness, bringing forth flowers and fruits of all virtues, establishing them firmly in the minds of women and men. Whatever I see I bring to completion; I persevere in all things. I trample no one down but hold everything in peacefulness, and no one condemns me. But when you build a tower, I destroy it with one word, and I scatter all its spoils. Thus you will perish. But I will remain in eternity.’

The seventh figure had human form from his head to his loins, except that his hands were the hands of an ape. From below his loins he resembled a goat, but his feet were so deep in the aforesaid darkness that I could not perfectly make them out. He also wore no clothes and appeared quite naked.[16]

13. And he spoke: ‘A sweet life and a beautiful life I find within me. Why should I abstain from it? For this life in which I am created was given me by God. Why should it matter if there is pleasure in my flesh? At first copper seems hard and black in appearance, but afterwards it shines like gold – so likewise if there is any tarnish to my flesh, it is not reprehensible. There are many in the blindness of this life who do not know what they are doing. For my part, I know this life and I intend to keep it!’

14. And again I heard the response of the voice from the storm-cloud:[17] ‘You naked creature! Why do you not blush with shame in mistaking a blind and mute life for that life in which there is no

darkness of night? In your behaviour you have transgressed all justice and truth, for you do not live a rational life!

‘But I know that this worldly life will dry up like hay; therefore I sigh for a life that will not fail. I draw to me the harmony of heaven and all the angelic spiritual joys; I can never have my fill, for I have my fellowship with them, and I will never depart from them.’

15. And I saw that the aforementioned Man had drawn a three-edged sword and fixed it to his neck by the hilt, and he swept it back and forth, ready to strike. And the sword spoke:

‘As Zeal of all zeal, I wage war against the North Wind and all who inhabit it! Who can withstand me in the fight? No one! For I am not formed of matter coming together in conjunction. Man with woman did not summon me into existence; but I control all works in every species. For God formed man from the soil of the earth and in man he carried out all his creative work, and I look to God as in a mirror.’

28. The Voice from Heaven (from *The Book of Life's Merits* I)

Hildegard was at pains to emphasize that in her visions and prophecies she not only saw unknown images and mysteries but also heard their interpretation as a voice from heaven speaking to her. What is not always clear in The Book of Life's Merits *and other works is where the modern editor or translator is to punctuate the text. Where does the 'voice from heaven' actually finish speaking? The answer to this is uncertain, and perhaps deliberately so. The voice from heaven merges with the voice of the human visionary and exegete. But Hildegard is serious about her visionary experiences, and she relates them to the experience told in Paul's Letter to the Corinthians of how a man was taken up to the third heaven where he heard 'hidden words, which it is not permitted for anyone to speak*'.

From *The Book of Life's Merits* I

16. Then I heard a voice from heaven saying:

'Who among all creatures can enumerate the works of God? And how many are there who inhabit the kingdom of God? And who are they, and how many are they and what are they who talk among themselves and speak in favour of the black schism[1] and seek their god in the North wind and worship him there? All the just things instituted by God they perversely sift and scatter, and they tear them apart in their minds saying: "This kind of life is truly good, while that is bad." And so instead of God they have their own knowledge, but they do not know what they are doing!'

17. For the works of God that are worked through humanity remain in everlasting life, as the words of Ezekiel also show when he says about the four living creatures:

'And as for the likeness of their faces: there was the face of a man, and the face of a lion on the right side of all the four, and the face of an ox on the left side of all the four, and the face of an eagle over all the four.'[2]

The meaning of this passage is as follows. The work of the activity of God is man, and this work is from God.[3]

The 'face of the man' signifies the goodness of God, through which humanity has the perception of the senses.

The 'face of the lion' represents the power of God, in which God gave reason to humanity. And this is on the right because the goodness and power of God through the understanding of the greatness of good works are like wings which extend divine inspiration.

The 'face of the ox' indicates the sacrifice which is God, and it demonstrates to humanity how to sacrifice to God. And this is on the left because in the act of sacrifice something is lacking: one thing is given and another is relinquished. Similarly whoever offers their will to God meditates partly on heavenly and partly on earthly

things. For in the sacrifice God draws human beings to himself; and he inspires them to make themselves also a sacrifice to God.

The ‘face of the eagle’ signifies the knowledge of God, which gives knowledge to humankind and the possibility of the knowledge of how to please God. This exceeds all other virtues, for it is an awesome power within us and it is the life of the human race; and this life will never fail; but it breathes everywhere and sees everywhere, and it appears in men and women like the stars in the firmament.

18. But though there is great knowledge in us, there is no person able to enumerate the works of God or to count the number of people who will come into the possession of the heavenly places, for just as the divine works are innumerable so also are the people who through those marvellous works will attain to the heavenly mansions. But neither will they be able to count the numbers of people who, led astray by the devil’s promptings, will make their habitation with the devil. God, however, knows the numbers of all beings.

19. There are very many secrets in God which he reveals to no one as they really are, but only in part, according to his will and pleasure. For he alone knows all things, as he also contains them and preserves what he has made, for he is in everything according to the disposition of his grace.[4] This is shown by the present vision that you see before you, for the ‘Man of such stature that from the tops of the clouds in the sky he reached down into the abyss’ signifies God.

20. He is called ‘Man’ for good reason, because all power and all living things proceed from him.

21. He is also the same man of whom the prophet speaks: ‘The Lord shall go forth as a mighty man, he shall stir up jealousy like a man of war: he shall cry, yea, roar; he shall prevail against his enemies.’[5] The meaning of this is as follows.

Before the ancient days the Lord had gone forth to the heights of his power, so that his power was life to the living in every species of creature, and so that the life which he made had the potential to go forth into the multiple diversity of all creatures. And the same Man by his ancient counsel established all good things abundantly, and he so fully ordained the edifice of the virtues that no empty space could be found within it. Thus he fought in great fullness against his enemies, and at their heart is that Pride who attempts to climb before he has seen the ladder and who tries to sit down before he has placed his seat, and whose work is idle rumour; and when all fails he advances to his destruction.[6]

But the same Man in the fullness of his manly works awakened an anger like a burning flame in the order of the angels, which totally defeated the enemy when he tried to engulf heaven with the darkness of his malice. And so a great cry was raised in the full power of the will of God and in the joy of victory, and the host of angels gave voice saying: 'Who is like God?' In this cry - like a powerful wind among winds - all the heavenly host called out that the devil had been overthrown; and they rejoiced that by this means no evil would be seen in heaven. Thus the ancient enemy fell into the darkness without light and without the joy of life. But he prepared his quiver and arrows against the will of the Man of war.[7]

But the Man prevailed against his enemies through another work on which he had worked, namely through humanity whom he created; and in this strength he began to renew the struggle against the arrows and malice of the deceitful enemy.

22. He then took up 'the Word that became flesh' as his banner of conflict. This fight will endure until the number of the brethren, that is, the blessed, is fulfilled. And again the Man will join in a great battle with the enemy, just as he had fought with him before in heaven: but he will destroy him completely, because the enemy stood in the idleness of sins and sat in the power of deceit and malice. But whoever has refused to do these things is blessed, and his blessed state will never cease.[8]

23. ‘The Man is of such stature’ that he extends from the beginning of created things until the very end of the world. While human beings are able to speak from the time they are made until their demise, they are ignorant of what was before and what will be after them. Only God has no beginning and no end.[9]

24. ‘From above his shoulders the Man was higher than the clouds in the bright ether.’ This is because only he knows, in the mystery of divine glory, what was before the beginning of the world. For God is exalted above all and in all things so that neither the angels nor the souls of the just can fathom him completely. From him all living beings proceeed, while he himself has no beginning or origin but remains at one in himself. For he lives in himself, he has his power in himself, he holds his knowledge in himself. He who lives, empowers and knows is God; in these three capacities all God’s works are distinguished and perfected, and in him his works receive their potential to fulfillment.

25. God is eternal, and eternity is fire, and this is where God is. And God is not hidden fire or silent fire, but fire in action, for God’s power directs all the thought and understanding of his creatures, in the glory of his mysteries and secrets, just as the head directs the body: for he has made rational life so that the eyes can see, the ears hear and the nostrils smell, and so that the mouth may utter rational speech. God, therefore, is the head of all believers; yet he does not reveal all the things that are concealed in the Godhead, because in him there is the mysterious life of the hidden life, just as he maketh his ministers a flaming fire in judgement.[10] For before judgement is done it must first be heard. And so it is with God.

Before the time of the Law – as it were before his shoulders – he tested with water and fire the people who lived before the Law, because they could not be tested by any other kind of law.[11] But later, under the Law, he purged them with various hard trials; these he himself also fulfilled, when, as a man, he destroyed the devil in his power and cleansed humanity from the stains of their sins through true justice.

26. As the prophet says: ‘the government shall be upon his shoulder’. The meaning of this is as follows.

Justice in the power of God came about through a human being, when God came forth as a human being; and when, as it were on the shoulder of his strength,[12] he destroyed the works of the devil and plundered hell; and when he baptized through his apostles and resounded throughout all the earth. God has perfected justice in himself for the sake of man, who was made out of earth and fell into mortality; for in the first blossoming of his development man was misled by the devil, who opened his own belly and threw forth all the filth within; by this means he marks out all the sons of men, who are impregnated with venom in the fire of excess. But God assumed flesh in the wholeness of virginal flesh through the heat of the Holy Spirit and without the venomous seed of a man.[13] And in this way he became a man and cleansed men of all the devil’s poisonous filth: because he was clean without sin, he washed sinners clean of their sins and brought them to salvation.

27. ‘From below his shoulders down to his thighs he was beneath the clouds in another white cloud.’ The meaning is this. From the beginning of all created things up to that true beginning when Truth originated from the earth, within the mystery of the divinity, God held fast to many miracles in the white radiance of his glory and honour. Of these, some he revealed and some he obscured in cloud. In this way God’s will for the ordinance and salvation of holy souls is radiant and white in secret and spiritual life. But it is impossible for all these things to be revealed to human knowledge.

28. Under his shoulders the Man has imposed a kind of service on humanity when he placed them under the old laws; for these were like the sound of a word and not the actual word itself. First of all the sound of the word is heard, and then afterwards the word itself is understood. Similarly the Old Law was the sound and shadow of the word, after which the Word, that is Christ, then appeared.[14]

29. ‘From his thighs to his knees he was in the earthly air.’ Just as all things pertaining to the flesh come from the thighs and are supported and moved by the knees, so also all created things are carried by God and are nourished in the heat of fire and moisture of air in which there is the open life of corporeal things. In the same way the New Nation comes from chastity to life-giving power in which it is revealed to all, although only in the earthly sphere; and it is moderated by the great sweetness of miracles and virtues. For when Divinity joined with the Virgin, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit the Word was acknowledged in his humanity, and he revealed the New Law through himself. There, in that instant, the sound and the word came together in unity when the Old and New Laws met in agreement.[15]

30. But just as the Old Law was in shadow, while the New can see clearly, so also the souls of the saints cannot have their full joy in the period when, as in the Old Law, they are separated from their bodily habitations. They cannot see the face of the Father since it is impossible for one half to see fully what is a whole. But when they have received their bodily habitations and are whole again, then they will see perfectly what is a whole. From that time on they will not be changed; in the same way, the New Law sees what the obscured Old Law could not distinguish, and it will never be changed into anything different.[16]

31. ‘From his knees to the calves of his legs he is in the earth.’ The knees support a person’s weight and the calf muscles lend strength to the feet; in the same way God bears all things and fortifies all things; he gives strength to the earth so that she can support the other created things, for her strength is their sustenance.[17] The earth is as it were the knee and calf muscle for the other elements, and like a cart with its wheel and axle she bears along the rest: she guides the water this way and that and causes it to flow, and if it were not for the earth interposed between the air and the water, the air would not allow the water free passage.

But just as the knee may flex and yet be retained by the calf muscles, so also the earth at times may flex under the inducement of other created things into situations in which she cannot carry out her functions appropriately. But she does not become unstable, because the strength of God restores her once more to her rightful condition.

In the same way the vocation of the New Nation – made manifest through the whole circle of the world by the spreading of the gospel, and strengthened by that manifestation – will experience the sweat and perspiration of many trials and tribulations when her knees are shaken by the Antichrist. Yet having strength in her calf muscles she will not falter, for in her head is all her trust and reliance. But through suffering her head also was induced into a different state from the one in which it was first seen by humanity and, like the knees bending, the head distanced itself from humanity in order to retain its full strength. So also the Church, now transformed into the New Law, will fall back somewhat during the time of the Terrible Destroyer, but she will receive her powers once again and endure invincible.[18]

32. 'And from his calves to the soles of his feet the Man is in the waters of the abyss in such a way that he also stands above the abyss.' This is because God's strength and marvellous vitality are hidden things; they stand in the waters of the abyss on feet which cannot be seen, as mysteries which humankind can never fathom. And just as there are many unknowable things in the upper reaches of the cosmos, so also in the depths of the abyss are many powers which lend their strength to the waters, though they can never be known by humankind. For God holds all the things under the earth in his control and directs and judges them; and the underworld falls under his judgement. There is nothing that is not in his power.

For this reason everything stands constant in his mysteries, for God has revealed his secrets to no one completely. He rests in his mysteries – like the Man standing on his feet – just as he rested on the seventh day from his work of creation.

Likewise during the time of the Antichrist, the vocation of the New Nation will not lose its strength. Rather she will conserve her strength until the happy conclusion to the marvellous and (for humanity) unknowable workings of God. She will stand firmly on her feet[19] in the power of those marvellous workings, until the last day, and she will not falter, for on that day all weakness will come to an end.

33. And since no one can truly fathom the depths, so also no one can know what will happen to the lost. Concerning these things Wisdom says:

34. 'Who hath measured the height of heaven, and the breadth of the earth, and the depth of the abyss?'[20] The meaning of this is as follows.

The sphere of the world is set in motion by fire, wind and air, and every created thing is held safely within it. The heaven with all its adornments is placed at the top of this sphere. (Who is the one who can encompass this fully with his sight?) The breadth of the earth is ringed with flowing waters, and everything that flows above the abyss is so to speak in the middle of the sphere, though no human being can ever truly comprehend this. The abyss – with all its marvels – is so to speak at the bottom of the sphere. No one can understand this completely, except God himself, who created it. Humanity lives within this sphere and is encircled by its circumference. For this reason, no human being can pass beyond such a limit to the power of his comprehension. Created things live within the power of God like the heart within a human being, which is only one small part compared to the rest of the body. Living creatures are thus a small part of the greater whole that is the vast and incomprehensible power of God. And all creatures in heaven, earth or the abyss can neither comprehend him, nor perceive him, nor delimit him.

All wisdom comes from God the ruler of all. With his wisdom he foresaw all things and composed all things in the cosmos, and with that same wisdom he distinguished every creature from the next. It

was Wisdom who knew and tasted heavenly things and travelled round the circle of the heavens in her regal ministry. She crossed the earth in the service of her duties, fixing the functions of every creaturely existence, and she penetrated the abyss.[21] She is like the good administrator who allows nothing to perish that has been assigned to her. But Wisdom is also the eye of God, through whom he foresees and oversees all things. She stands before him as his fondest friend in loving embrace, considering and reckoning all things with him. Through Wisdom also, human beings are named the heights of the heavens, because they surpass and dominate all other creatures through knowledge, the eye of Wisdom. But they also resemble the breadth of the earth, since they have the power of desire and yearning. Now how is this possible?

What someone desires will also delight them, and so they demand that for which they feel desire, and then it is granted to them according to what their will is. If they pray to God for something he will help them, but if they turn to the devil, he too will run to them with evil promptings. People also have desires and yearnings according to their reason and appetite. However, when they gain what they desire or yearn for, this comes about not through their own ability but through the permission of God, for it is he who created them. And since human beings can do many things, they also have desire and yearning, through which they can demand many things. Because the devil deceived the first man, so he also leads him astray by many promptings.

Human beings resemble the depths of the abyss when they turn from the desire for good and call upon the devil. According to their will then the devil supports their desires, and God allows this to happen. And when someone has good desires and does good things, but at some stage nevertheless fails – not through giving up good things completely, but through neglect – then God will not allow that person to perish, since he or she still had the desire for good within them. But the devil does not trust such a person to follow completely the desires of the flesh, since he recognizes in that person that God will not give them up. So this person is not like the

depths of the abyss but more like the weather which at one moment is bright sunshine and at the next moment changes into a black cloud. What a disgrace when a human being, who has been created above all divine works, abandons God to imitate the devil, that creature who lost his glory and in his pride opposed himself to God and perished! Who has ever measured such disgrace? Who can ever measure the loss when a human being abandons God and so to speak chooses for his or her false god the worst tyrant ever, namely the devil? God foresees such things and brings them to judgement.

35. 'The Man had turned towards the East, so that he looked both East and South.' The meaning is this: in the beginning of the world God commanded his creatures to go forth like the shining sun; and he not only brought his creatures forth but also multiplied them to perfection, like the sun shining high in the South. Though the human race had a good beginning, they fell away into evil; nevertheless God has not only restored us to our original state but also endowed us with even greater virtues of sanctity.

36.Now his face shone with such splendour that you could not perfectly see it.' This is because the holy Deity is burning so bright in all goodness and justice that no one has the power to contemplate it. For there is no God beyond God, and no one is like him in his works, because in all his marvellous actions he alone is God. His works are unfathomable, as is God himself. He is the energy by which the life of angels is fired, and out of that splendour come many mysteries; these in themselves make up the wondrous life of marvels, which is in God. Such marvels are beyond any number: in the heavens, the earth, or the abyss.

37. 'The radiant cloud was at his mouth in the likeness of a trumpet.' The meaning is this: the delightful divine order comprehends all things proceeding from God. It joins with the divine will like the sound proceeding from a trumpet 'full of the rapid soundings of all musical sounds'. For all things rational and irrational immediately obey the divine order in the fullness of their

subjection. And they do this for his honour and praise, since God created them. God is good, and all things that proceed from him are good.

38. ‘And when the Man blew a breath, it sent out three winds.’ The meaning is this: passing by hidden inquiry through the profound order of his will, God allowed three paths of justice to appear, according to three hierarchies of blessed creatures: ‘One wind bears a cloud of fire, one a cloud of storms, and one a cloud of light; and each cloud is supported by its wind.’ The first – the path of justice – carries like a cloud of fire the glory of the angels, who burn in the love of God and desire only what God wills. The second path bears like a cloud of storms the works of men, turbulent and variable in their many anxieties and tribulations. The third path bears like a cloud of light the pure white virginity of the incarnation of the Lord. Justice is the foundation of these winds and sustains them in a state of beatitude.

For God, who ordained all things in the hiddenness of his will and allowed them to come forth, established first the spirits of the heavenly citizens in righteousness. He then sustained human beings in the turbulence of their behaviour so that they would not perish completely. Finally, through his pure incarnation and through the light of virginity he put to flight the works of darkness, and he showed which works are just. The angels remained in the love of God, but human beings – falling away from God – were restored through holy works to their former glory, for works perfected in sanctity have made us holy. At present the saints still labour in the work of the flesh, but after the Last Day they will rejoice in symphony and praise. For now the flesh constrains the spirit within the flesh, but then the spirit will subjugate the flesh; and in this way humanity will achieve full sanctity.

39. ‘But the wind bearing the cloud of fire remains before the Man’s face.’ The meaning is this: justice holds in the heights the glory of the angels burning in the love of God, and justice endures in the will and glory of God. And since the angels continuously contemplate his

face they are prompted always to do his will, and they never depart from him.

40. The other two winds descend with their clouds to his chest, and there they expand their breath outwards.' The reason is that justice accompanies humanity on two paths, that is to say, the path of the Old Law and the path of the Incarnation of the Son of God. With the good works of humanity, justice descends into the deep knowledge of God, where it expands outwards in many marvellous works. And God knows the works of the saints and does not bring them into forgetfulness, for in his hidden counsel he prepares an eternal reward for them, and he expands them outwards in infinite praise to his glory.

'But the wind that stays before the Man's face extends its cloud from the East to the South.' Shining in the presence of God with the glory of the higher spirits who have persisted in truth since the beginning of creation, justice strives towards the good works of men and women, so that they too may touch these heavenly joys and as it were come back to their good beginning. God has allied human beings and angels in one rationality, and he has provided guardian angels to protect men and women. He did this both in the Old and the New Testaments, but he associated them together with greater love in the New rather than the Old Testament. For in the Old Testament the angels were like a voice speaking to humanity, but in the New Testament angels and humans are inseparable, just as voice and word are now joined together.

41. 'In the cloud of fire are myriads of fiery beings; and they are all one life in one will and one conjunction.' This signifies a host of blessed spirits alive in a fire of glory and honour. Their glory is inexpressible and their number is uncountable, so that no one may know how many they are, except the Knowledge of God. What God wills they also will, and they are joined together as one, like a body which cannot be divided. Although they have individual faces, nevertheless they are one in their conjunction, just as a body has

limbs yet remains one body. In this way they are one single unanimous life.

42. ‘And in their presence a writing tablet is laid out, filled with feathers; the tablet soars in the precepts of God when the precepts bear it aloft.’ The explanation is that before them is the mystery, full of divine judgements, and this is revealed according to the will of God, whenever the will of God wishes to reveal it.

‘And the knowledge of God had inscribed hidden mysteries upon it, on which the myriads of beings gazed with unified zeal.’ This means that God in his hidden purpose has other hidden purposes for which the blessed spirits wait in intense expectation. Moreover, when God sees some people bowing down to idols and others not keeping his commands, then, through the fiery judgements of the heavenly citizens who blaze in his love, he awakens the wings of the wind: he sends thunder and lightning onto the earth; he brings fear to the nations through famine, plague and plundering armies; and thus he brings fearful disasters upon all the earth.

43. And when the angels ‘have studied what is written, the divine virtue comes upon them and like a single mighty trumpet they sound forth in harmony with all varieties of music.’ This means that when they gaze upon the will of God, they also receive the power of God so that in one mind they send forth praises to God in the strength and fullness of all joys. In responding to all the purposes of God they speak nothing else but praise, since all his judgements are true and just.

44. This is what John heard in his Apocalypse, and it is written: ‘Lord God Almighty, your ways are true and just.’[22] The meaning of which is as follows.

O Lord, through fear you are called Lord, and through love you are God, and through your governance of all you are Almighty. Your ways are true and just: for true Fear dispels all other fears, and true Love allies us with all other loves, and true Power holds other powers in check. For when human beings, in their presumption,

make their own laws, as if they themselves were God, then through your just judgements you show yourself to them and teach them that none has the power to withstand you. When also they place the love of the flesh higher than their just love for you, then you trample that love in the bitterness of pain. And they find no consolation save in you.

But when they come so far, through not keeping your commands, that they bow down to images instead of your name, then you wage war in just judgement against your enemy who, from that first deception, has persuaded the human race to hold you in disdain. And then you send down thunder and lightning upon the earth. You pour forth the floods from the waters. You order the land to be unfruitful. You bring forth pestilence and wars among them. You teach them to know and acknowledge that all this occurs through none but you; that all your judgements are just and true.

45.The hosts of angels praise the good works of humanity and, because of those works, not for one hour nor for one moment do they cease from their praise; it sounds forth unceasing and never-ending. Now God wants the praise of the angels so that their glory will increase. To him this is pleasing. And in their praise he wants the angels to make clear and manifest the works of the saints, for the human race is made in the image and likeness of God, and so he wants the angels to praise the works of men and women in his presence. But because the human race is supported by the help of God alone, in the same way also God wishes to be praised by humans and angels together so that their glory may be magnified.

46. And so God has fittingly created all things. But, it is said, the mysteries of God, which shine in his sight, are incomprehensible to human knowledge; they are in angels, spirits, ministers, in those who call out and those who rejoice in their joy; and these mysteries are unknowable to human knowledge as to who, what, and of what quality they are. And although the human race is like a mountain in its knowledge, since it rises up after God in its knowledge and reaches to the heights, yet no one ever sees the summit of the

mountain or even the higher part of the mountain, which is the knowledge of God.[23] And no one ever ascends that far, nor can they know the mysteries of God or the mysteries of those beings who are always present in the sight of God.

Some of those beings who are always in the sight of God have been named by the prophets and by other saints who have seen visions through the Holy Spirit. But others, who spoke a little about them when they were touched by divine inspiration, have not been named.

47. As is written by the Apostle Paul: ‘He heard hidden words, which it is not permitted for anyone to speak.’[24] The meaning of this is as follows. This man’s heart needed to be strengthened by the inflowing of many great miracles so that he could lavish on other people the strengthening power of the virtues. He therefore perceived hidden words, words with foreknowledge, words hidden from men and women who do not know through whom or by whom or how these words were uttered; or what kind of words they were or what mode they had. Just as no one can see the Divinity, so also it is not permitted for any human being to say how these words are brought forth by the utterance of the voice or by the praiseful expression of God’s mysteries. For the words are concealed completely in the mysteries of the spirit, and humanity in the flesh is alien to them.

29. The Unknown Language

The Unknown Language (*Latin* Lingua ignota) *presents something of a puzzle. It was compiled in the middle period of 1151–8, before work began on* The Book of Life's Merits. *As in many medieval glossaries, the words are classified rather like a thesaurus, and arranged in a hierarchical list beginning with expressions for God, angel and human being, and finishing with the names of trees, plants, herbs and animals. For an impression of the style of the language, the following examples are of interest:*[1]

ENGLISH	*LATIN*	*LINGUA IGNOTA*
God	*Deus*	*Aiguonz*
angel	*angelus*	*aieganz*
saint	*sanctus*	*ziuienz*
Saviour	*Salvator*	*Liuionz*
devil	*diabolus*	*diuueliz*
spirit	*spiritus*	*ispariz*
human	*homo*	*inimoiz*

In this small sample, a few patterns of word formation[2] *emerge which would repay further study. As to the question of how the 'unknown language' was used, a satisfactory answer has not yet been offered. It has been suggested that it was a secret language for communication between the nuns at the Rupertsberg. Alternatively, as a passage in* The Book of Life's Merits *indicates,*[3] *it may have been purely a sacred language, and*

this conjecture is supported by a text in which words from the language occur. In a song on the dedication of a church, Hildegard replaces standard Latin words with her own expressions from the lingua ignota. *Although the theme and inspiration for the piece is the well-known vision of Revelation 21:2, 'And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband', the result has an additional sense of mystery appropriate to a vision of heaven.*

The original text of the song is as follows, with non-Latin words in italics, and a modern English translation.[4]

O *orzchis* Ecclesia
armis divinis praecincta
et hyazintho ornata,
tu es *caldemia* stigmatum *loifolum*
et urbs scientiarum.
O, o, tu es etiam *crizanta*
in alto sono et es *chorzta* gemma.

[Church *immeasurable*,
protected by divine armour,
and decorated with hyacinth,
you are the *perfume* of the wounds of the *peoples*
and the city of all kinds of knowledge.
Oh you are also *adorned*
in deep music, a *gleaming* gemstone.]

30. Allegorical Letters

The six letters selected here illustrate varying aspects of Hildegard's allegorical method. The first and possibly the earliest of the six, an admonitory letter to the imperial supporter Hermann of Constance, uses the imagery of pruning garden plants to remind the bishop of his duties, while the second letter, to a provost at Averbode, develops a more traditional image of the pastor as shepherd of his sheep. In both cases Hildegard's message comes from the 'living light' or 'secret light' of her visionary experience. The third letter, to an abbess, is a response to a more personal query, but nevertheless turns the 'lion' of a biblical verse into a challenging allegorical figure. In her message to the papal supporter Eberhard of Salzburg Hildegard sends her advice, encouraging the bishop (like Gregory the Great before her) to divide his time equally between spiritual reflection and pastoral action. As in the letters to Abbot Adam and Prior Dimo that follow, Hildegard develops personified allegorical figures, the maidens Love, Humility and Obedience; these are virtues and powers who stand at the threshold of the human mind, waiting for an invitation to lend their strength and assistance.

Hildegard to Hermann, bishop of Constance, 1148–66 [Letter 36]

The living light that reveals miracles speaks. In your official position you are a father and a pastor for the guidance of souls; stretch out your hands to prevent a hostile man from sowing your field with tares! Watch over your garden, therefore, which the divine gift has planted, and take care that its aromatic plants do not dry up. Cut away the rotten parts and discard them, for they are suffocating the

usefulness of your plants. In this way allow your plants to prosper. For when the sun hides its rays, the world too withdraws its joy.

And I say: do not darken your garden with the tedium of silence, but prune in the true light what needs to be pruned. Light up your temple with good will; kindle a flame in your censer and throw in the myrrh, so that the smoke will rise up to the palace of the living God. And you will live forever.

Hildegard to Provost Andrew at Averbode, before 1166 [Letter 54]

The secret light says: You are frightened of the wind; you are falling asleep in the green tree of your mind. But the man who has the green force of vitality in his inner heart builds on the height of the wall of the house. A good shepherd feeds his sheep, but if he does not have the inner strength to help them when danger comes, and if he runs away in his weariness, then he is of no benefit to the office of pastoral care. He might as well be a sheep himself rather than a shepherd!

Human being! You are struggling in the waves, hardly able to save yourself from sinking. Though you see prudence everywhere, you are lacking in strength. But you are not lacking in will, and so the grace of God will shine forth within you.

Hildegard to the Abbess of Altena, before 1173 [Letter 49R] [1]

You who are an abbess and teacher[2] in the brightness of the leaping fountain, the representative of Christ, listen: 'Behold, the lion of the house of Judah, the root of David, hath prevailed.'[3] The meaning is this: the son, splendour of the holy Godhead, is like a root. He also roars like a lion when he casts the first angel with his followers into the abyss.[4] With rending teeth he drives all injustice from him.[5] In this way, then, he is the root of fortitude. And he draws to himself

all those who confess him with good works. In this way he prevails over all things like a lion. Listen now to my admonition to you.

Hildegard to Eberhard, Archbishop of Salzburg, 1163–4 [Letter 25R] [6]

In your office as representative of the Son of the living God, I see your present status as being like two walls joined by a cornerstone. One of these walls appears like a bright white cloud. The other is partly in shadow. The two are so placed that the brightness of the one wall cannot mingle with the darkness of the other wall, nor can the darkness affect the brightness.

The two walls are your labours, joined together by your soul. On the one side, in the brightness, your sighs and efforts pant towards God along the narrow way. On the other side, somewhat in the shadows, your labours are directed to the people under your authority. The fact is that you regard the brightness of your efforts as something personal to you. The shadows of your labours, on the other hand, you regard as something foreign to you. You do not allow yourself to mix the two activities and so you frequently feel a tiredness in your soul. And you do not realize that your efforts towards God and your labours in the world are equally valid.

In fact, when you pant with great effort for heavenly things and when you exercise God's pastoral care for the people, the two can be connected in the one reward. Just as Christ adhered to heavenly things and nevertheless turned his attention to the people. As it is written: 'You are gods and all of you sons of the most High.'[7] In other words, you are 'gods' in heavenly matters and 'sons of the most High' in the pastoral care of the people.

Therefore, father, let the fountain of Wisdom flow through your labours, the fountain from which Love and Obedience drew their water, the two daughters who were dressed in the garments of the King. For Wisdom ordained all things with Love, drawing forth many smaller streams, as she says: 'I alone have compassed the

circuit of the heaven.'[8] Through Obedience, humanity has received a command from God. On the one hand there is the garment of Love, who looks upon the face of God only in the angelic orders. On the other hand, there is the garment of Obedience in which the Lord was clothed in his humanity.

These two maidens are knocking at your door, and Love says to you: I want to live with you. I want you to bring me to your bed and keep me in zealous love. For when you touch and wash wounds with compassion, I lie in your bed, and when you treat simple and clean-living people with benevolence in God, then I am your zealous lover.

But Obedience also speaks to you: I will live with you, because you keep the laws and commandments of God. Therefore hold me tight with all your strength, not as an estate overseer but as your dear loved one. For you indeed received me when you were baptized, and you held me when you made progress in the discipline of obedience and in high office when you obeyed God's commandments. For Love is my matter,[9] and I was born from her.

Again, O father, Wisdom speaks to you: Be like the father of a household, who gently listens to the foolishness of his sons but does not abandon his prudence: In the same way, I unite heavenly things and earthly things for the use and benefit of the people. Therefore touch and wash their wounds, hold the simple and clean-living people, and with God's help have joy in both sides of your life.

Now, O father, I – a poor woman – see that your will is opting for the doorway of the virtues, who will come to you so that with the end of your body you will be complete. May he who is[10] and surveys all things keep your body and soul in his salvation.

Hildegard to Abbot Adam of Ebrach, before 1166 [Letter 85R/A] [11]

In a true vision of the spirit in a waking state, I saw the likeness of a beautiful girl shining with a splendour so bright that I could not

look upon her properly. She had a cloak whiter than snow and brighter than a star. She wore shoes as of purest gold. And she had in her right hand the sun and the moon,[12] gently embracing them. On her breast was an ivory tablet in which there appeared the image of a human being coloured sapphire blue. And the whole of creation acknowledged the beautiful girl as their sovereign Lady. And she said to the image on her breast: 'With thee is the principality in the day of thy strength, in the brightness of the saints: from the womb before the daystar I begot thee.'[13]

And I heard a voice saying these things to me. The girl you see is Love,[14] who has her dwelling in eternity. For when God wanted to create the world, he inclined himself in the sweetest affection, and foresaw all things necessary, just as a father provides an inheritance for his son; and in this way he ordered all his works in a great burning fire of love. Then every creature in every species and form acknowledged its Creator; for in the beginning Love was the base matter[15] from which all creatures came. And God said 'Let it be done',[16] and it was done, for every creature was made through Love in the twinkling of an eye.

'The likeness of a beautiful girl is shining with a splendour so bright that you cannot not look upon her properly.' This is because she reveals the fear of the Lord in such pure knowledge that mortal humanity cannot fathom it completely. And she has 'a cloak whiter than snow and brighter than a star', because, in her pure white innocence without guile, she cloaks all things with the most splendid works of the saints.

'She wears shoes as of purest gold', because she has paths in the best part of God's election.

'She had in her right hand the sun and the moon, gently embracing them', because the right hand of God embraces all creatures and extends further to nations, kingdoms, and all good things. Therefore it is written, 'The Lord said to my Lord: Sit thou at my right hand.'[17]

'On her breast is an ivory tablet', because in the knowledge of God, the earth of wholeness flourished in the Virgin Mary. And in it

‘there appeared an image of a human being coloured sapphire blue’, because the Son of God shone forth in charity from the ancient of days.[18]

‘And the whole of creation acknowledged the beautiful girl as their sovereign Lady.’ It all comes from her because she was the First One creating all things, just as the image on her breast shows that God clothed himself in humanity for the sake of humanity. For when all creation was fulfilled by the command of God – just as he said ‘Increase and multiply and fill the earth’[19] – then the heat of the true sun descended like dew into the Maiden’s womb, and from her flesh he made humankind just as he formed Adam in flesh and blood from the clay of the earth. And the Maiden gave birth to him in her wholeness.

But it was good that Love should have wings. For when the man Adam first walked the earth, he experienced a pressure to fly, but instead he fell, and it was only the wings of Love that raised him up. This was through holy humility. For when the bad senses brought Adam down, divinity kept close watch so that he did not perish completely in the fall, and so that divinity might redeem him in the holiness of humanity. And these were wings of great power, for humility raised up the man who was lost. And this humility was the humanity of our saviour, for Love created man, but Humility redeemed him.[20]

In all truth, the eye of love is hope, but its heart is heavenly love,[21] and the two are joined together by abstinence. The eye of humility, on the other hand, is faith; its heart is obedience and the two are connected by renunciation of the world.

Love was in eternity; and at the beginning of all holiness she brought forth all created things without any contact with evil. But she created Adam and Eve from the natural purity of the earth. And just as the two of them were ancestors of all the children of men, so the two virtues of Love and Humility gave birth to all the other virtues.

Human being to whom I am speaking! These Virtues are knocking at your door now and saying, ‘O tabernacle of the man who remains

with us in the morning, you are worn out already!' And Love says to you, 'O faithful friend, we do not wish you to retire from the bonds of your office. When God in the circle of heaven wished to send forth all his creatures, we embraced all his works and laboured with him! But humanity fell; we wept with them but did not abandon them, even though they rejected us.'

And Humility speaks to you especially, 'What troubles human beings suffered though I held them up! But you say that you want to escape. Nevertheless, you have a load to carry to the vineyard. Yet you stand still and refuse to walk in your sluggishness, looking for another way to go!'

We know that our comrade will not act like this. If the people love you, work with them!

'And when the wind roars with the rumours of war and the instability of all human endeavours and activities, then look to me, and I will aid you with the circle of power contained in my wings.'

Samson lost his great strength through the foolishness of a woman. Take care that this does not happen to you if you respond in your exhausted state. Solomon too lost his great glory through the foolishness of women. Watch out carefully so that the green fruitfulness which you have from God does not dry up through the carelessness of your thoughts! Look to the ornaments of gold and precious stones that Love and Humility have laid up within you. Give glory to God also for the arm-bands which Wisdom has given you. The people run to you to receive them. Work with the people, and you will remain with the sun!

Hildegard to Prior Dimo, 1169–70 [Letter 58]

In a true vision I saw and heard these words. Life sees and overcomes death, as the small boy David defeated the giant Goliath. I see a mountain rising up on high. A valley lies below; at times it allows flowers to blossom in their green force of vitality, but it also brings forth useless grasses, thorns and briars.

Now, human being! Understand the meaning! Two men were sitting in a house; one was a knight, the other a slave. And two beautiful wise maidens came to the house and knocked on the door, saying, ‘We have heard of your reputation in distant lands, and it was a poor reputation, for you have spoken badly of the king. And the king has said of you: “Who do these ruffians think they are? And who do they think I am?” Hear now our counsel for your victory.’

‘I am Humility. I have seen the life of God’s son in the Incarnation, and I have trodden down death. The mountain is the works of obedience, and the valley of the flowers is benevolence, which the storms of the vices often frequent as thorns and briars.’

Human being! The knight, that is Obedience, and the slave, that is Pride, are sitting in the house of your heart. Love and Humility[22] are knocking at the door of your mind, so that you do not commit all the wrong that you are harbouring within you. You should know that the slave is overcome by the knight. And so the beauty of Obedience will never fall beneath his feet.

But Pride says: ‘It is impossible to break the chains with which I bind human beings!’

To which you should respond by listening to the words of Love, who says: ‘I sat untouched in heaven and I kissed the earth. Pride swore against me and wanted to soar beyond the stars, but I threw him into the abyss. Trample down now the slave of pride and stand fast within me! I am Love, O my son; embrace Humility as your Lady. And in so doing you will never be troubled or confounded!’[23]

31. A Vision of Love (from *The Book of Divine Works* I, i)

This excerpt from The Book of Divine Works, *written in the period 1163-73/4, sees Hildegard's visionary gifts at their height. Beginning with a vision reminiscent of the prophet Ezekiel, Hildegard moves to a paean of divine immanence as embodied in a figure who is at once Love, Wisdom and Power. Its nearest equivalents are the sapiential tradition of the Old Testament Apocrypha, notably Wisdom of Solomon 7–8, and its theme is summed up in Ecclesiasticus 24:1, which states that 'Wisdom shall praise herself, and shall glory in the midst of her people'.*

From *The Book of Divine Works* I, 1

1. And I saw as amid the airs of the South in the mystery of God a beautiful and marvellous image of a human figure; her face was of such beauty and brightness that I could more easily have stared at the sun. On her head she had a broad band of gold. And in that golden band above her head there appeared a second face, like an old man, whose chin and beard touched the top of the first head. Wings protruded from behind the neck of the figure on either side, and rising up clear of the golden band their tips met and joined overhead. On the right, above the sweep of the wing, was an image of an eagle's head, and I saw it had eyes of fire in which there appeared the brilliance of angels as in a mirror. On the left, above the sweep of the wing, was the image of a human face, which shone like the brightness of the stars. These faces were turned towards the East.

But from each of her shoulders, a wing extended down to the knee. And she wore a tunic like the glory of the sun and in her hands she carried a lamb like the bright light of day. But beneath her feet she trampled a monster of dreadful appearance, black and venomous, and also a serpent, which had fixed its teeth into the right ear of the monster and wound the rest of its body across its own head, and had stretched its tail on the left side.

2. The figure spoke: I am the supreme fire and energy. I have kindled all the sparks of the living, and I have breathed out no mortal things, for I judge them as they are. I have properly ordained the cosmos, flying about the circling circle with my upper wings, that is with wisdom. I am the fiery life of divine substance, I blaze above the beauty of the fields, I shine in the waters, I burn in sun, moon, and stars. And I awaken all to life with every wind of the air, as with invisible life that sustains everything. For the air lives in greenness and fecundity. The waters flow as though they are alive. The sun also lives in its own light, and when the moon has waned it

is rekindled by the light of the sun and thus lives again; and the stars shine out in their own light as though they are alive.

I established the pillars that support the whole circle of the earth. I made the winds, and, subject to them, the wings of the winds, which are lesser winds. Through their gentle force, these contain the stronger winds and prevent them from showing their full strength with great danger; in the same way the body covers the soul and contains it lest it breathe out and expire. And conversely also, just as the breath of the soul strengthens and sustains the body so that it does not weaken, in the same way the stronger winds energize the subsidiary winds to carry out their appropriate tasks.

Thus I am concealed in things as fiery energy. They are ablaze through me, like the breath that ceaselessly enlivens the human being, or like the wind-tossed flame in a fire. All these things live in their essence, and there is no death in them, for I am life. I also am rationality, who holds the breath of the resonant word by which the whole of creation was created; and I have breathed life into everything, so that nothing by its nature may be mortal, for I am life.

And I am life: not the life struck from stone, or blossoming from branches, or rooted in a man's fertility, but life in its fullness, for all living things have their roots in me. Reason is the root, through which the resonant word flourishes.

Therefore as God is rational, how could it be that he did not act, since he allows all of his works to flourish through the human being whom he created in his own image and likeness and in whom he marked out all creatures according to their measure? But it was in eternity that God wished to create his great work – the human being – and when he had completed that work he entrusted human beings with all creation so that they could create with it in the same way that God created his work, that is, humanity.

So I am the helper, for all living things burn through me; and I am steady life in eternity, without beginning or end, the same life which is God in motion and activity; and yet this one life has three powers: eternity is the Father, the word the Son, and the breath

connecting the two the Holy Spirit, and similarly God signified the same in human beings in whom there is body, soul and rationality.

The fact that I 'blaze above the beauty of the fields' means this: the earth is the matter from which God makes man and woman. The fact that 'I shine in the waters' signifies the soul, for – just as water flows through all the earth – the soul permeates all of the body. 'I burn in sun and moon'; this refers to rationality, and the 'stars' are the innumerable words of rationality. 'And I awaken all to life with every wind of the air, as with invisible life that sustains everything.' This signifies that whatever grows and matures is animated and preserved through air and wind, and it deviates in no way from the power within.

3. And again I heard a voice from heaven, which spoke to me:

God, who created all, made humanity in his own image and likeness, and in them he marked out both the higher and lower creatures. He had such love for humanity that he destined them to take the place from which the falling angel had been ejected, and he ordained them for the glory and honour which the angel in his bliss had lost. This is shown by the vision you see. For when you see 'as amid the airs of the South in the mystery of God a beautiful and marvellous image of a human figure', this signifies the Love of the heavenly Father in the strength of his unceasing divinity, beautiful in its selectivity, and marvellous in its gifts of mysteries, appearing in the human figure because, when the son of God assumed human flesh, he redeemed lost humanity through the service of Love. This is why the face was 'of such beauty and brightness' that you 'could more easily have stared at the sun', because the abundance of Love emanates in such brightness of gifts that it far surpasses all exercise of human understanding (by which it can discern diverse ideas in the soul) – so far, in fact, that no person can grasp such abundance with their senses. This signifies symbolically that things may be perceived through faith that cannot be seen visibly with the eyes.

4. 'On her head the human figure had a broad band of gold', because only universal faith, diffused round the whole ambit of the

earth and originating in the bright splendour of the first dawn, can encompass in all devotion the great abundance of true Love, namely that God in the humanity of his son redeemed human beings and confirmed them with the downpouring of the Holy Spirit, so that one God is acknowledged in the Trinity who without temporal beginning before eternity was God in the Godhead.

'And in that golden band above her head there appeared a second face, like an old man'; this signifies the all-surpassing goodness of the deity, without beginning or end, who succours the faithful, because his 'chin and beard touched the top of the first head', and so by his disposition and protection of all, God touches the height of utmost Charity, in which the Son through his humanity leads lost men and women back to the heavens.

5. 'Wings protruded from behind the neck of the figure on either side, and rising up clear of the golden band their tips met and joined overhead.' This means that the love of God cannot be separated from the love of neighbour, since they proceed from the virtue of Charity in the unity of faith, and through great longing they encompass that faith. And the holy Godhead covers the immeasurable splendour of his glory from human beings for as long as they remain in the shadow of death, deprived of the heavenly tunic which they lost with Adam.

6. 'On the right, above the sweep of the wing, was an image of an eagle's head', and you saw it had 'eyes of fire in which there appeared the brilliance of angels as in a mirror'. At the heights of triumphant subjection, then, when a person submits to God and conquers the devil, she is carried aloft in the joy of divine protection. And, fired by the Holy Spirit, when she raises up her mind and fixes her gaze upon God, then the blessed spirits appear in her in plain sight and offer to God the devotion of her heart. The eagle thus symbolizes the spiritual men and women who in full devotion of mind and in contemplation frequently gaze upon God like the angels. Therefore the blessed spirits, who ceaselessly contemplate God, rejoice in the good works of just people, and they

show these works to God with their own natures, and so they continue their praise of God and never come to an end, for they will never exhaust his fullness. Could anyone ever count all the innumerable wonders which God brings about through his power and might? Indeed for the angels there is a brightness as of many mirrors, and through this brightness they see, but no one is as active or as powerful as God, since no one is like him, and he is not subject to time.

7. Before the beginning of time, God held in his foreknowledge everything that he has since made. Outside of any moment or passing of time before eternity, all things visible and invisible appeared in the pure and sacred godhead, as trees and other created things when close to water are reflected in it; and though they are not actually in the water physically, nevertheless an accurate shape appears there. When God said '*Fiat*, let there be…',[1] at once all those things that did not have bodies assumed a physical shape – all those things which he had seen in his foreknowledge before the beginning of time. Just as in a mirror all things are reflected that stand before it, so all his created works appeared in holy divinity outside the passage of time. And how could God be empty of the foreknowledge of his works, since each of his creatures – once it has assumed physical form – is whole and perfect in its designated function; for the holy Divinity knew in advance how he would be present as thought, knowledge and function. A beam of light reveals the form of a created thing through its shadow, and likewise God's pure foreknowledge perceives the form of every creature before it is embodied. Each thing that God intended to create in his foreknowledge, before it was bodied forth, shone out according to his likeness; and in the same way a man or woman will catch sight of the sun's splendour before they actually see its substance. And just as the splendour of the sun indicates the sun itself, so also the praise of the angels reveals God, for it cannot ever be that the sun is without its light, and in the same way neither can the deity be without the praise of the angels. So the foreknowledge of God came first, and his work of creation followed; and if his foreknowledge

had not preceded, then his work would not have appeared, for you can tell nothing by looking at a person's body until you see their face: but when you see the person's face, then you can praise their body. In this way a human being contains within him or her both the foreknowledge of God and the activity of God.

HILDEGARD'S LIFE AND INFLUENCE

32. Queries and Requests: Selected Letters to Hildegard

In the twelfth century, writing a letter was rather like composing a speech. The main intended effect was aural, and the purpose was to convey the spoken word by another medium, so that the recipients of the letter could hear 'the voice of the absent person' who had composed it. When it was received, the letter was read out loud, so that all present, whether literate or not, could participate in its message.

The communal nature of the letter meant that its style was oral and rhetorical, with a conventional structure of salutation, exordium, narration, petition and conclusion. Hildegar's first letter, for instance, the appeal to Bernard of Clairvaux (which has already been considered for its content in the Introduction), could be analysed structurally along these lines, and more examples of conventionally structured letters are found below. At least in theory, the opening of the letter, the salutation, had to obey a rule whereby the names of sender and recipient were placed in order of seniority. The exordium that followed then set the tone for the letter, with a suitable biblical quotation or moral to capture the attention of the recipient(s).

If the sender was an important writer, then the letter would be valued very highly both in itself, as a token of the friendship of the sender, and also for its message and content. This phenomenon is partly to be explained by the long and expensive process involved in sending a letter. The message was first dictated to a scribe, who would take notes on his wax tablet, translate the letter if necessary, and then transcribe it onto parchment. It would then be delivered: important bishops and abbots had their own messengers, but otherwise the letter would have to await the arrival of a carrier

already travelling in the same direction. Naturally this led to delays in the receipt of letters, and a corresponding value was attached to them when they finally arrived. Sometimes private messages were also conveyed by the bearer of the letter to ensure that they did not reach the wrong ears. Often when a letter was composed for posterity, a copy was retained before the original was sent, and an important author would have his or her letters gathered, edited and in some cases rewritten for the final collection.

As far as Hildegard's correspondents are concerned, most are important people of her day, perhaps not surprising when we recall that she was a member of an established noble family from Bermersheim. She was frequently approached with specific requests, for instance for texts of sermons she had preached, or for advice on particular matters. Though the subject-matter of letters to Hildegard is usually spiritual, it also concerns political matters, whether of Church or state; in the present selection there are allusions to the Second Crusade, the Synod of Trier, the Council of Rheims, and the schism between pope and emperor, as well as to abuses and corruption within the Church itself. Two of her correspondents here – Bishop Henry of Liège, and Archbishop Eberhard of Salzburg – were to a greater or lesser extent supporters of the Emperor Barbarossa, and both are named witnesses to the imperial deed of protection which Barbarossa issued to the Rupertsberg in 1163 during the wars and disturbances of the schism. Other correspondents[1] *include an abbess without an abbey (Gertrud), and a Paris academic*.

Abbot Bernard of Clairvaux to Hildegard, 1146–7 [Letter 1R] [2]

To his beloved daughter in Christ, Hildegard, from Father Bernard, called the Abbot of Clairvaux. If the prayer of a sinner can be of some effect.

You seem to hold our meagre status in greater esteem than our own conscience allows, but we attribute this to your humility. Nevertheless I have by no means neglected to reply to your

charitable letter, although the numerous duties of this office compel me to keep my reply shorter than I would wish.

We wish you joy in the grace of God that is within you, and for our part we beseech you to acknowledge it as grace and to respond with all the affection of humility and devotion, knowing that 'God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble'.[3] For the rest, where there is clearly inner knowledge and anointing that teaches all things, what remains for us to teach or admonish? Rather we humbly entreat you to remember us before God, along with those who are in spiritual communion with us.

Odo of Soissons to Hildegard, 1148 [Letter 40] [4]

To the lady Hildegard, the exalted maiden of Christ, from the humble and unworthy Odo of Paris, master, but only in title and position. I send you my prayers and whatever else is deemed worthy for a person of such sanctity and nobility.

Because, Lady, you have made yourself the servant of Christ, he has raised you above yourself. It is believed that in part the secrets of the virginal bridal chamber have been revealed to you, though you are still here in the flesh. You are believed to be one of those of whom it is sung: 'The king has brought me into his chamber.'[5]

But a prophetic and faithful soul says sighing: 'My secret to myself, my secret to myself.'[6] And King Hezekiah opened up the storehouses of his aromatic spices and the treasuries of the temple to the messengers from Babylon and so grievously angered the Lord.[7] Nevertheless, blessed are they who so far excel us sinners that they can discern heavenly matters. And on the paths they walk they are open to the spirit of discernment for those who by the grace of God have gained treasures more by being tested than by revelation. And here below among men and women they learn from their visions what they should reveal and what they should conceal. Since in their humility they allow God to confer the gift upon them, they place certain things under a seal,[8] and they do not make known any

things that might disturb the apostolic and ecclesiastical institutions. Wise woman! listen to these things, for 'the woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised.'[9] They say that you are taken up in the heavenly places and see many things which you bring out in your writing; also, that you bring forth the melodies of a new song[10] although you have not studied any of these things.

We are not at all surprised about these things, for they do not exceed the expectations we have of your purity and sanctity, without which no one can achieve any such things. But what we can know is that whatever is revealed about the saints there, manifests their glory; and whatever is practised by them here, demands a kind of humility.

As far as we are concerned, we are a long way away from you, but we have the confidence to ask of you the following request. The fact is that many scholars argue that God is not identical with both paternity and divinity.[11] Please expound to us what you see in the heavens about this problem and send it to us. Farewell.

Heinrich, Archbishop of Mainz, to Hildegard, 1151 [Letter 18] [12]

Heinrich, Archbishop of the see of Mainz by the grace of God, to Hildegard the beloved mistress of the Rupertsberg. Grace be with you and our fatherly affection.

Since we have heard great and marvellous things about you, our neglect in not visiting as often as we could is to be condemned. But prevented by many matters, only rarely and reluctantly do we lift our soul to the things that are eternal.

But to come to the point of this letter: we hereby announce to you that some messengers, religious from a certain noble church, have come to petition us about a sister who is still living in a nun's habit in your monastery.[13] They are asking that she be released to them now that she has been elected as abbess. Therefore by our authority as prelate and spiritual father, we command you, and

conjoin you by this command, to release her immediately for her office to those who seek her and need her. If you do this, you will have our gratitude from this day forth more than ever before. If you do not, we will command you again more forcefully, and we will not cease until you fulfill our instructions in this matter.

Henry, Bishop of Liège, to Hildegard, 1148–53 [Letter 37] [14]

Henry, by the grace of God Bishop of Liège, to Hildegard the servant of Christ and of Saint Rupert at Bingen. May you serve the King of kings unceasingly and gain the prize of eternal joy.

Finding myself in great turbulence of mind and body, I decided to write to you because I need God's mercy, for I must admit that I have angered his mercy with many evil actions. Therefore, dearest sister, because I know for certain that God is with you, I urge and admonish you in your sanctity, through his mercy, to give me your hand as I waver completely and as I take my refuge in you. Make it your concern to watch over me with devout prayers, that my negligence may be taken from me.

Do reply to this letter and tell me what the living light has revealed to you so that I can rouse myself from sleep. May the most merciful God grant that through you I will perceive a most certain comfort in your writings. And may he grant me through your intercessions to enter the final dwelling-place of eternal peace.

Arnold, Archbishop of Cologne, to Hildegard, 1150–(?) 56 [Letter 14] [15]

Arnold, Archbishop of Cologne by the grace of God, to Hildegard, a burning lamp in the house of the Lord at the Rupertsberg. May you remain always under the protection of the heavenly God.

If you are progressing well, and if all the things around you are guided by God, then we will rejoice. And because of your merits we too are progressing well. But we are unable to come to see you as we had arranged some time ago. As far as we are able at present, however, we will commit ourselves to you, placing our hands in yours, joining our faith to your faith and commending ourselves wholly to you.

Meanwhile, whether or not it is finished, do not hesitate to send us by messenger post the book you wrote under the inspiration of God's Spirit when you were far away from any interference.[16] For we are unable and unwilling to be without it. We do not want to tempt God; rather we wish to see his miracles and wonders.

The nun Gertrud (of Stahleck) to Hildegard, after 1161 [Letter 62] [17]

To Hildegard, her most lovable mother in Christ, from her own Gertrud, with a true petition that God may grant 'things which the eye saw not, and the ear heard not, and which entered not into the heart of man'.[18]

I am at a loss as to what I should say or write to such a unique and beloved mother in Christ, for the power of love has taken from me all knowledge of speech. Indeed, your divine absence has made me drunk on the wine of sorrow.[19] This has upset me so much that I feel an aversion not only to dictating a letter, but even to life itself. For I could almost believe it better never to have seen you, never to have felt your great and heartfelt kindness towards me – all this rather than my ceaseless mourning for the great distance that separates me from you as though you were lost.

But I hope in my God, I say *my* God, because I have nothing dearer than him, and I hope that he will never allow me to put aside this frail body before he has granted me the sweet joy of seeing you and hearing you speak so beautifully. But if this does not happen, because of my sins, I trust in his goodness that he will not frustrate

my hope of allowing me to see you there, where we will never be separated from his sight.

What more is there to say? I ask you, dearest mother, to pray for me to him in whose embraces you remain constant and in whose shade you repose, please pray that I will escape like a young roebuck from the heat of vices and temptations. I am still wandering and searching for him, but alas without finding him. Please pray that he will reveal himself to me and I will find him. May he allow me to sit in the shade of the one whom I desire.[20] Farewell.

The Abbess of St Theodore and St Mary, Bamberg, after 1157 [Letter 61] [21]

To Hildegard, beloved lady and mother, venerable in her religious life and dignity, from L., although unworthy, an abbess in name only at Bamberg, one only among all the nuns committed to God. You are often in our prayers, in whatever way the devout and frequent prayers of the lowly can be of benefit.

Blessed lady, we rejoice in Christ, as much as we are capable, that the Lord who has ordained you as his elect has illumined and filled our times with the spirit of prophecy. Christ therefore has encouraged us in this above all, that he not only foresaw and predestined you of the female sex, but his grace also enlightened many people through your teaching. We therefore offer our great thanks for you and we petition with humble prayers that the deeds he has begun in you he will bring to perfection by his mercy, until he leads you to the things of eternity.

We humbly beseech you that you will find us worthy of being received into your fellowship and that you will eagerly commend us to your holy community and strengthen us with letters of support. Farewell, beloved lady.

An Abbess of Altena to Hildegard, before 1173 [Letter 49] [22]

To the lady and mother Hildegard, loving and worthy in Christ, intimate with his love, from N., the Abbess of Altena, although undeserving, a penitent sinner sitting with Mary at the feet of Christ[23] and hoping to see her loved one just as he is.

I wish you joy in your blessed state, most loved of all women. As can be proved by your most evident delights, you have found the One whom your soul loves as much as is possible for mortal people to do. And spending happy times with him now in the secret chamber of your heart,[24] you have tasted and seen that the Lord is sweet.[25]

I realize that I must bear with equanimity that although I am so devoted to you, you have neglected to visit me with your letters. For I believe that if you could avert the eye of your mind for a moment from the contemplation of your beloved and take a step outside your dwelling-place of peace, you could not fail then to console me more often with your messenger, who would make me happy with reports of your health and would carry back news of me to you. For if it is not given to me to see your beloved face again in this life (and I cannot say this without shedding tears) nevertheless I will always be happy about you, for I have decided to love you like my own soul. And so I will see you with the eye of prayer until we reach our destination. There we will see each other forever and we will earn the right to contemplate our beloved face to face[26] in all beauty.

Eberhard, Archbishop of Salzburg, to Hildegard, 1163–4 [Letter 25] [27]

Eberhard, by the grace of God servant and Archbishop of the Church at Salzburg, although unworthy, to Hildegard the sister and mistress of the Rupertsberg at Bingen, I pray (if the prayer of a sinner has

any worth) that after the triumph over the flesh you will enter with your wise virgins into the embraces of the heavenly bridegroom.[28]

I am a sinner placed in this vale of tears, exhausted by the many winds and storms of this age; I have passed through fears within and fears without. Eagerly I ask for your love, that you would be willing to pour forth your petitions on my behalf, so that divine compassion will open the heart of piety to me and mercifully carry me away from all my troubles. For because of the schism that has now affected the Church, the Emperor is attempting to use force against us.

O virgin worthy to God, in your love you will remember that when I was at the Emperor's court at Mainz,[29] I eagerly commended myself to your holy name so that through your intercession, the status of my life would be advanced in the Lord and come to a happy fruition. You also promised me in my unworthiness that once you had received my letter you would not hesitate to write a reply according to what the Lord was willing to reveal to you. In my unworthiness I beg you in your sanctity to fulfill the obligation of that promise.

Farewell, virgin of God, and remember me. Whatever you may write in reply, please place it under a seal.[30]

Abbot Adam to Hildegard, before 1166 [Letter 85] [31]

To the lady, his beloved mother, Hildegard, mistress of the sisters at Rupertsberg in Bingen, from brother Adam, although unworthy, of Ebrach. I write what little I can.

When I first received the fame of your name, I rejoiced with a great joy.[32] God increased my joy when, with a command both benevolent and marvellous, he directed you to show your face and allow your voice to be heard in our land.[33] And he allowed me something I had scarcely been able to hope for, namely a meeting and conversation with you. At our meeting, as I expect you remember, I told you of my anxiety. And because different people

feel different things – some having this experience, others that – if my prosperity and salvation is assured before the Lord then God be praised. But if there is danger, please pray to God that he will grant my soul prosperity and salvation and guard me against any kind of danger.

On your behalf now, I am sending a messenger with a letter to the Emperor. And I hope by the grace of God that we will be heard. On any occasion where you need our assistance, we will be ready to serve you.

We pray also that you will be able to pray for us, for we are tossed by a storm of worry for our brothers. We pray that the grace of the Holy Spirit, which works many wonders in you by the spirit of prophecy, will also look to us and protect us. We ask also that your letter will console us and strengthen us.

33. From *The Life of Hildegard*, Book 2, by Theoderich of Echternach

Begun in a conventional style by Gottfried of Disibodenberg, who wrote the first of the three books which make up the whole work, the Life of Hildegard *was commissioned by Ludwig of Trier and another Gottfried, two men who had both served as abbots at the monastery of Echternach, now in Luxembourg. The new author Theoderich included otherwise unknown autobiographical material in his text, which gives the work an additional interest.*

Theoderich of Echternach, *Life of Hildegard*, Book 2

1. So this blessed virgin began her book of visions at Disibodenberg, and completed it at the place to which she had moved at God's command. She revealed certain things about the nature of the human being, the elements and the diversity of created things, and how the human being is to be helped by a knowledge of such things;[1] and she made known many other secrets with prophetic spirit.

It is also known how elegantly she replied to letters sent to her from diverse places, if anyone wished to consider more deeply the meaning of the words that she drew from the divine revelation. Indeed, the correspondence is gathered in one volume, both her own letters and those sent to her.

Who is not amazed that she published songs with the sweetest melody in marvellous harmony?[2] And she compiled an alphabet of letters never seen before and a language never heard before. Apart from this, she commented on the Gospels and wrote other typological expositions.[3] And because all these things were unlocked for her by the key of David 'that openeth and no man shutteth, shutteth and no man openeth',[4] her soul could rejoice with good cause and sing that 'the king hath brought her to his storerooms'[5] that she might be 'inebriated with the plenty of his house',[6] and so that by fear of the Lord, as is written, she will conceive and give birth and bring the spirit of salvation over the earth.[7]

This is a good thing and worthy of praise, that those things which she heard and saw in the spirit she kept in her pure and careful mind, wrote down with her own hand and passed on orally with the same wording and the same meaning. In so doing, she was content to have one single faithful man as her fellow initiate,[8] who presumed, for the sake of the art of grammar of which she was ignorant, to correct the cases, tenses and genders, but who did not presume to add or remove anything from the sense or understanding of the text.

Indeed she wrote to Pope Hadrian about this matter that in the heavenly vision she had heard the following said : 'Since what you were shown from above you do not reproduce in the Latin language of common usage, since this skill has not been given you, therefore he who has the file should not neglect to perfect it to a sound fit for human ears.'[9]

2. It seems appropriate at this point to insert some writings from Hildegard's visions and show on the basis of these texts how appropriately the saying from the Song of Songs can be applied to her: 'My beloved put his hand through the opening of the door, and I trembled to the core of my being.'[10] These writings are as follows.

First vision: In the mystical vision, she says, and in the light of the love from Wisdom which never fades I heard and saw these words as follows:

Five tones of justice, sent to the human race by God, sound forth, in which the salvation and redemption of believers consists. And these five tones are more excelling than all the works of men, because all the works of men are nourished by them. These are tones whose sounds do not fade, with which all the works of man are perfected in the five senses of his body. And such is their ratio.

The first tone was perfected by the action of the faithful sacrifice of Abel, which he brought to God; the second, when Noah built the ark at God's command; the third when Moses was given the law, the end-point of which was the circumcision of Abraham. At the fourth tone the Word of the Father on high descended into a virgin's womb and took on flesh, because the Word had mixed earth with water and so created man; therefore all creatures have called through a man to the one who made them, and so because of man God has carried all things within himself. For God created man at one time, and at another he carried him, in order to draw to him all those whom the serpent's counsel had caused to be lost. But the fifth tone is perfected when all error and mockery is ended, and then men will see and know that no one can act in any way against God. By this means the Old and New Testaments are perfected in five tones and

the marvellous number of humanity is brought to completion. And after these five tones, the son of God will be given a shining countenance, so that he is openly recognized by all flesh. Then the godhead will act within itself for as long as it will.

Wisdom in the light of love also teaches me and orders me to tell how I was granted this visionary gift. I myself do not speak these words concerning me, rather it is true Wisdom who speaks, and this is what she says: listen, human being, to these words, and speak them not according to you but according to me. Learn from me, and speak in this way about yourself.

When in my first formation God roused me in my mother's womb with the breath of life, he fixed this gift of visions in my soul. For, by the year 1100 after the incarnation of Christ, both the teaching of the apostles and the burning justice which God had established in Christian men and women were beginning to grow slow and inconstant.

It was in these times that I was born, and with sighs my parents dedicated me to God. And in my third year I saw such a light that my whole soul trembled; but because of my young age I could not put it in words. At the age of eight, I was offered to God for the spiritual life;[11] and until I was fifteen I saw numerous visions and spoke many things about them in a simple way so that those who heard them were amazed at where they could have come from or who they were from.

Then I in turn was amazed at myself, because when I saw these things in the depths of my soul, I still had the outward use of my eyes; and I was amazed that I did not hear of such things happening to anybody else. So I concealed the vision that I had in my soul as much as I could. Of the outside world I knew very little, because I had been so frequently ill from the time of my mother's milk until now. My body was weakened by the illness and my strength had failed.

Exhausted by all this, I asked a nurse of mine whether she could see anything else apart from external objects.

‘Nothing,’ she replied, since she could not see any of these other things.

Immediately I was gripped with a terrible fear, and I did not dare reveal the experience of these visions to anyone else.

Nevertheless, I took to predicting future events, sometimes speaking many things and sometimes having them taken down in writing. And when I was completely steeped in the vision I spoke many things that were very strange to those who were listening. But when the power of the vision had lessened, then I behaved more in the character of a child than of someone of my years; I was terribly ashamed, and often wept, and on many occasions I would much rather have kept quiet if I had been allowed to.

Because of the fear that I felt towards other people, I did not dare tell anyone actually how I saw my visions; but a certain woman of high rank to whom I had been sent for my upbringing became aware of this and revealed it to a monk that she knew.

God filled this woman with his grace like a channel of many waters, so that she gave her body no rest from vigils, fasting and other good works until she worthily ended her present life, the merits of which God has made plain with various beautiful signs. After her end I continued to see visions until the fortieth year of my life.

Then, in the same experience of a vision, I was compelled by a great pressure of pains to make known what I had seen and heard. Yet I was terribly afraid and ashamed to put into words what I had kept quiet for so long. But then my veins and marrow became filled with powers I had lacked in my childhood and youth.

I intimated these experiences to the monk who was my teacher. A reliable man of high standing in the cloistered life, he was like a pilgrim from the coarseness of behaviour of many men. Willingly he listened to my account of these marvels. He was astonished and commanded me to write them down secretly until he could see what they were and where they might be from. But thinking that they might well be from God, he intimated this to the abbot, and from then on he eagerly worked with me at writing them down.

In that same vision I understood the writings of the prophets, evangelists and other saints, and certain philosophers, although I had not had any human instruction, and I expounded some of their writings, although I hardly had any knowledge of letters, because an uneducated woman had taught me. But also I composed and sang songs with melodies in praise of God and the saints, again without any human instruction, although I had never learned neums or singing.

When these things were brought to an audience at the cathedral in Mainz and discussed there, all said that they were from God, and from prophecy, in the same manner as the prophets of old used to prophesy. Then my writings were presented to Pope Eugenius III when he was at Trier. Willingly he had them read in the presence of many, and he himself read them out. And trusting fully in the grace of God, he sent me to put into writing, more attentively than I had before, all those things that I had seen and heard.

34. Gebeno of Eberbach: The *Pentachronon*

During Hildegard's lifetime the monastery of Eberbach in the Rhinegau had enjoyed good relations with Rupertsberg. In 1220, perhaps influenced by the current interest in Foachim of Fiore, Prior Gebeno of Eberbach set about compiling his Pentachronon (The Five Ages), *a prophetic work based on excerpts from Hildegard's writings. The extract he made from the following correspondence well illustrates his technique. In 1150 Conrad III (King of Germany before Barbarossa) had written to Hildegard after his elder son and heir Henry had died leaving only a six-year-old brother to succeed to the throne. As a reply, Hildegard wrote in her prophetic manner, but nevertheless sent some general personal and political advice. For his excerpt, however, Gebeno chose only the second half of Hildegard's letter,*[1] *thus omitting all the personal context of the original exchange of letters.*

[Conrad III to Hildegard] [2]

Conrad, by divine grace and favour King of the Romans, to Hildegard, the maiden dedicated to God and teacher of the sisters of St Rupert in Bingen, greetings and favour.

Prevented by our regal position and shaken by various winds and storms, we are unable to visit you as we would wish. Nevertheless we have not neglected to write a letter to you, for, as we have heard, you are truly held in abundant high regard because of the sanctity of your innocent life and because of the glory of the Spirit descending upon you so marvellously. Therefore, although we lead a secular life, we hurry to you, we take our refuge in you and we humbly seek the help of your prayers and exhortations. For we live very differently from how we should.

Nevertheless you can assume that wherever we can we will certainly hasten to serve and support you and your sisters in every cause and need. Therefore I commend myself and my son, whom I wish to succeed me,[3] to your prayers.

[Hildegard to Conrad III]

The One who gives life to all says this. Blessed are they who subject themselves worthily to the office of the high king. For them God has provided in his great foresight so that he does not allow them to fall from his lap. Remain there, O King, and cast away all squalor from your mind. For God preserves all who seek him purely. Hold your kingdom in the same manner and dispense justice to all your subjects, so that you do not become separated from the heavenly kingdom.

Listen! [*Gebeno's text begins here:*] In a certain way you are from God. The times in which you live are light-headed like a woman. They are moving towards a hostile injustice which is trying to destroy the justice in God's vineyard. Afterwards, worse times will come in which the true Israelites will be scourged and the Catholic throne will be shaken by error, and so their proclamations will be blasphemies like a dead body. Therefore this pain will be smoke in the vineyard of the Lord. And after these, stronger times will arise in which the justice of God will be raised up somewhat and the injustice of the spiritual people will be marked out for ejection and they will not yet be provoked to contrition. But then other times will appear, in which the riches of the Church will be dispersed, so that the spiritual people will be torn as by wolves, and they will be expelled from their places and their homeland. Therefore the first of them will cross to solitude, successively having a poor life in great contrition of heart and thus serving God in great humility. In fact, the first times will be neglectful of God's justice, the following truly weary. Those times which come thereafter will rise somewhat to justice; but those which arise afterwards will divide both like a bear, and their riches will accumulate through evil; but those which

follow will manifest the sign of a manly strength, so that all the perfumers will run to the first dawn of justice with fear, shame and wisdom; and the princes will have unanimous agreement, like a victorious man raising a standard against erring times of great error, which God will destroy and exterminate as he knows and as it pleases him.

And again he who knows all things speaks to you, O king. Hear these things, O mortal man, restrain yourself by your will and correct yourself, so that you come to those times purified, and then you will no longer be ashamed of your actions.

35. From the Canonization Protocol

In the thirteenth century, just as the need arose for Hildegard's sanctity to be confirmed, the process of official papal recognition of a saint became more rigorous and discriminating. In this new development, the procedure for canonization was entrusted to a special commission, which arranged interviews with those who had known the saint during his or her lifetime or with those who had knowledge of miracles reported to have taken place in some way due to the saint's influence. The canonization protocol for Hildegard herself was compiled during the pontificate of Pope Gregory IX (1227–41). The first protocol was completed in 1233 but rejected for the lack of corroborating influence, especially the lack of reliable names of interviewees or of people reported to have been cured by Hildegard's influence. A second protocol was commissioned in 1237 and finished by 1243, but there is no evidence that it actually reached Rome; perhaps the prelates of Mainz, the diocese under which Hildegard's monastery fell, decided to abandon the case. In the end, therefore, the case for Hildegard's sanctity was decided unofficially by the popular devotion of local Rhineland churches, and today Hildegard features as the focus of devotion in a number of well-known locations, notably of course in Eibingen and Disibodenberg.

In the following extracts from the canonization protocol, the accompanying letter is addressed to Pope Gregory IX by the delegates of the commission, Gerbod, Walter and Arnold of Mainz. The delegates in turn cite Gregory's letter in full before continuing with the actual findings of the commission.

From the Canonization Protocol

1. To the most holy Father, Lord Gregory, the supreme priest of the holy Roman Church, from the cathedral provost Gerbod, the dean Walter and the scholar Arnold of St Peter's in Mainz. Our respects to you in due reverence and devotion. We received the commission from you in the following form:

2.1. 'Bishop Gregory, the servant of the servants of God, to his well-beloved sons the cathedral provost, the dean and the scholar of St Peter's in Mainz. We send our greetings and apostolic blessing.

2.2. 'God, who is marvellous in his saints, confirms by the power of miracles those who sowed the seed in tears, and he shows by a series of signs that he gives eternal glory to them for their merits. Accordingly, the beloved daughters of Christ, the abbess and sisters of the monastery of Rupertsberg in the diocese of Mainz, have made the following request. Because up till now, God has caused many miracles to be performed, and intends to perform even more, through the merits of Saint Hildegard of blessed memory, the abbess of the above-mentioned monastery, and because Hildegard, who did not study any writings other than the Psalter, composed many books, by the revelation of the Holy Spirit, worthy of notice to the Roman Church; and because we have heard of her praiseworthy and holy way of life while we were working in a lesser office and were sent as legates into the areas of Germany, for all these reasons we ought now to exalt her on the earth whom the lord has honoured in the heavens, by canonizing her and inscribing her name in the catalogue of the saints. And we should order her books to be brought to us and given authority by us that they might be received and read by all.

2.3. 'A light in the darkness should not be concealed, nor a town on a mountain be hidden. Whatever God has worked through the merits of Hildegard should be brought to light because she is said to have shone with miracles so that she is held to be a saint in the above-mentioned regions. For these reasons, we are inclined to accept the requests of the aforesaid women who believe that

something with such obvious proof should not be neglected. We therefore command you by these apostolic writs, that you should diligently research the truth, on our behalf, about her life, monastic calling, reputation, merits and miracles, and in general to find out all the circumstances of her life, with the help of reliable witnesses, and then to expound to us what you have found faithfully under your seals and send us the aforesaid books under seal by a reliable courier. If you cannot all be present at these inquiries, then at least two of you should be there. Date in the Lateran, 27th January, in the first year of our pontificate.'

3. With the mandate of his authority, and having travelled in person to the monastery of Saint Rupert, we received the faithful witnesses with questions on the life, behaviour, reputation, merits, signs and other circumstances of the blessed Hildegard, rejecting a good many witnesses, since no more time could be had for the great number of witnesses available.

4.1. The Abbess of Rupertsberg[1] in Bingen, called Elisa, testified under oath to the miracles of the blessed Hildegard. She said that she saw how Mechthild, from the village of Lebenheim, was freed from demon possession at Hildegard's grave. She also saw how the noblewomen Reguwize and Seguwize were freed from demons in the same manner in the actual presence of the blessed Hildegard.[2] Afterwards they both served all their lives in the same monastery. She also saw several epileptics healed at the same place (as for their names, these are unknown, though God knows). Likewise people suffering from a tertian or quartan fever[3] were healed by the invocation of Hildegard's name at her tomb (their names are unknown because so much time has passed). Agnes the Prioress gave the same account under oath, as did the sister of the abbess. Also, the custodian Beatrix, Odilia the cellarer and Hedwig the lay sister claim under oath to have seen the same things.

4.2. The priest Rorich says the same under oath, but he added that when he came to exorcize the possessed woman Mechthild, and

even before he had spoken to her, she called out his double name ‘Heinrich-Rorich’, which had been unknown to them in those parts before that day. He also saw four ravens sitting at that time in the windows inside the church. When he asked the demoniac Mechthild who the ravens were, she replied saying that they were the demon’s companions waiting for him to be driven out. Having said this, she opened her mouth and breathed out a cloud of black smoke. In this way, the possessed woman was freed, and at once the ravens disappeared. The more reasonable part[4] of the convent testify to the same under oath.

4.3. He also adds that he saw eighteen demoniacs freed by the invocation of the same virigin’s name before her tomb (their names and places of origin are not known). The priest Daniel says the same under oath, as does the provost. When, in the course of questions, the abbess was asked about the timing, she said that all these things had happened thirty years previously.

[. . .]

9.1. The same [healing of demoniacs and epileptics] is told under oath by Hedwig of Alzey, and she adds that the blessed Hildegard was constantly in bed because of God’s scourge, until she was enlightened by the Holy Spirit, and then, walking through the convent, she would feel moved to sing the sequence *O virga ac diadema*.[5] The custodian and the female cellarer agree with this under oath.

9.2. [Hedwig of Alzey] again says that she saw a burning candle on the blessed Hildegard’s grave when a mass for the dead was being sung. After it was extinguished and the reading of the Gospel was begun, the candle was found to have lighted itself again, not once, but several times.

9.3. She also saw a man (whose name is unknown) insane, bound, and possessed by a demon, and several people held him by force on

top of Hildegard's grave. But in the end he freed himself from their hands and plunged into the river Nahe, which is at the foot of the mountain. And when most of the bystanders thought that he was dead, by the invocation of the grace of this virgin he was pulled out of the river alive. He confessed that he had been freed of the demon and he said that he had been protected from the water by the sleeve of the blessed virgin Hildegard. Public opinion in Bingen agrees that this happened, as does the greater part of the convent, under oath.

[. . .]

11.4. [The abbess] learned also that a certain noble lady of Trier (whose name is unknown) had gone mad through the magic of a certain young man, with the result that she was completely out of her mind. Her parents were grieving, and took refuge with the blessed Hildegard, seeking her grace. Hildegard took bread from her table, blessed it and gave it to the sick girl, who immediately tasted it and was cured. This miracle was seen by Odilia the cellarer and Hedwig the lay sister (as they swore under oath), who were both sitting at the table with the blessed Hildegard.

12.1. Likewise, when a certain man, who had been unjustly excommunicated, was buried at her monastery, and when, because of this, the Church of Mainz suspended the divine services and ordered that he be removed, she (the blessed Hildegard) made the sign of the cross over his grave with her staff so that his tomb could no longer be found.

[. . .]

12.3. Likewise, when the Bishop of Mainz, called Christian, was received in Bingen with the ringing of all the bells, Hildegard understood the bells sounding in the following way. One bell rang out the words 'Shepherd, mourn!' while the other rang 'Flee quickly to your salvation!' These words seemed to be addressed to the Bishop. The third bell rang out in the voice of the Bishop: 'I will

depart and leave this land in confusion.' She said these words to the nuns who were present when she was in the spirit. This is confirmed under oath by Prioress Agnes, custodian Odilia, Sophia and several others.

[...]

14.1. Bruno, custodian and priest at St Peter's in Strasbourg, speaks under oath of the life of the blessed Hildegard, according to what he has heard of her public reputation, and according to what he has read in the little book of her *Life*, which, when the blessed virgin died, was written immediately after her death by the two monks Gottfried and Theoderich.

14.2. He believes that this contains the truth in all aspects, namely, that she originated from noble parents, that when she was five she saw a cow and said to her nurse: 'Look how beautiful the calf is inside the cow, all white with dark patches on his forehead, feet and back!' The astonished nurse immediately told Hildegard's mother of this. Her mother commanded the woman whose cow it was to show her the calf as soon as the cow gave birth. When this was all done as the blessed Hildegard had predicted, her mother realized that it was true. Her parents were amazed, and seeing that she had a different character from other people, they decided to enclose her in a monastery. When she was eight, they dedicated her as an oblate to serve the Lord in Disibodenberg under the rule of the blessed Benedict, entrusting her to a certain recluse named Jutta, the sister of the Count of Spanheim.

14.3. Concerning her monastic vocation, he says that her reputation for sanctity spread widely and very many girls of noble family streamed to her. But when the anchorage building could not contain them all, she was admonished by the Lord, and indeed compelled, to move to the Rupertsberg. How she conveyed the news to the Abbot through her confessor and how he received it badly; how she miraculously obtained permission, moved to the location shown to

her by God and built a monastery there in that unfamiliar place; how she began to serve the Lord there with eighteen girls of noble family: all this is found in detail in the little book of the *Life of Hildegard*. In this monastery, she established fifty benefices for noble ladies, two for priests, and seven for poor women in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary. As well as this, she founded another monastery half a mile away across the Rhine, where she established thirty benefices.

14.4. On her reputation, he says that three popes heard of her fame and wrote to her, namely: Eugenius, Hadrian and Anastasius. The Archbishops of Mainz, Cologne, Trier and Magdeburg corresponded with her, also the Patriarch of Jerusalem, very many bishops, the holy abbot Bernard of Clairvaux, other abbots and provosts, and other prelates of churches; to all of these she sent replies. This information is taken from Hildegard's *Book of Letters*.

14.5. In addition, she began, in the forty-second year of her life (although she had no earthly teacher), to write not a few books by the revelation of the Holy Spirit, which are more fully described in the introduction to her book *Scivias*. She wrote the book *Scivias*, which took eleven years to complete. She wrote the *Book of Simple Medicine*, the *Book of Composite Medicine*, the *Book of the Exposition of the Gospels*, the *Songs of Heavenly Harmony* and the *Unknown Language*, with its alphabet, all of which she completed in eight years, as is told more fully in the preface to the *Book of Life's Merits*. Finally, she wrote the *Book of Divine Works* in seven years, which is revealed in greater detail in the introduction to that book.

[. . .]

14.7. On signs, he says that he believes in every way that the signs which the Lord performed through her in her life (which are also written up in the book of her *Life*) are true, and he believes that the miracles which the Lord performed through her, both during her life and after her death, are more than human memory can hold.

14.8. On the further circumstances of her life, he says that after he had made copies of her books according to the exemplars in his monastery, namely *Scivias*, the *Book of Life's Merits* and the *Book of Divine Works*, and after he had decided to make a pilgrimage to St Martin's, he took the above-mentioned books with him to Paris. And so that he could study them more securely, he managed (with great trouble and effort) to obtain permission from the then bishop of the locality to summon a meeting of all the masters then reading lectures in theology.[6] He gave to each of them twelve books,[7] to be examined in the period from the octave of St Martin to the octave of Epiphany. After they had examined them, they returned them to the bishop. The latter then entrusted the books to William of Auxerre, a master of Paris at that time,[8] who returned them to him confirming what the opinion of the masters was: that the words contained in them were not of human but divine origin.

14.9. On her reputation, [Bruno] says this. When his mother was in a village called Lorch, about two miles away from the monastery Hildegard had built, and when she heard from some other woman of the reputation for sanctity of the blessed Hildegard, she took her son with her in a ferry, crossed the river and begged Hildegard to place her hand of blessing upon him. Which she also did.

14.10. On the examination of the books, master Arnold, a scholar of St Peter's, who was studying theology at the time, says the same as Bruno. William, a canon of St John's in Mainz, agrees under oath with Bruno, apart from the account of the testing of the books and the story of Bruno's visit to blessed Hildegard. The greater part of the monastery agrees under oath with all of Bruno's account except for his visit to Hildegard.

14.11. Master John, a canon at Mainz, and now Provost in Bingen, agrees with the above account of the testing of the books, as he was studying theology in Paris at the time. He also says that a few people still living know better than he does about the truth of Saint Hildegard.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. For the correspondence, see the ongoing standard edition in translation by Joseph L. Baird and Radd K. Ehrman, *The Letters of Hildegard of Bingen*, so far in two volumes (Oxford, 1994 and 1998). For the vision of Lady Philosophy, see Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. V. E. Watts (Harmondsworth, 1969).

2. See R. Benson and G. Constable (eds), *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century* (Oxford, 1982).

3. For an introduction see Jean Leclercq, *Bernard of Clairvaux and the Cistercian Spirit* (Kalamazoo, 1976).

4. From *On Consideration*, in Pauline Matarasso (trans.), *The Cistercian World. Monastic Writings of the Twelfth Century* (Harmondsworth, 1993), p. 86.

5. From *An Apologia for Abbot Adam*, in *The Cistercian World*, p. 55.

6. Letter 90, in *The Cistercian World*, p. 97.

7. From *On Spiritual Friendship,* in *The Cistercian World*, p. 173.

8. The concept of spiritual friendship is discussed by Sabina Flanagan, 'Spiritualis Amicitia in a Twelfth-Century Convent? Hildegard of Bingen and Richardis of Stade', in *Parergon, Bulletin of the Australian and New Zealand Association for Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 29 (1981), pp. 15–21.

9. There is evidence from the letter to Werner of Kirchheim (Letter 149R in the standard edition) that Hildegard had read Boethius.

10. W. J. Millor and C. N. L. Brooke (ed. and trans.), *The Letters of John of Salisbury. Volume 2. The Later Letters (1163–80)* (Oxford,

1979), Letter 185, p. 224.

11. Letter 103R, to Guibert of Gembloux, written in 1175. The translation is by Robert Carver in Fiona Bowie and Oliver Davies (eds), *Hildegard of Bingen. An Anthology* (London, 1990), pp. 145–6.

12. Adapted from Robert Carver's translation in ibid., p. 146.

13. The Old Testament story of Huldah the prophetess must have provided an appropriate model for Elisabeth, and perhaps also for Hildegard. As told in II Kings 22:8–20, Huldah was consulted by King Josiah about the meaning of the book of the law and responded with a stern prophecy and admonition addressed to the king.

14. Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff (ed.), *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature* (New York and Oxford, 1986), p. 159.

15. The letter to Ludwig, probably written on completion of *The Book of Divine Works*, is translated in Peter Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1984), p. 194.

16. Translation by Franz H. Bäuml, *Medieval Civilisation in Germany, 800–1273* (London, 1969), p. 122.

17. For a history of the Cathars, see Yuri Stoyanov, *The Hidden Tradition in Europe* (Harmondsworth, 1994).

18. The image of the pearl in the earth is used for instance in *Scivias* II, 2, 4 (5).

19. See Psalm 23, 'The Lord is my Shepherd'. The parable of the Lost Sheep is told in Luke 15:3–7, while the story of the Good Shepherd (John 10:1–16) mentions the threatening wolf, as in Hildegard's fable.

20. Peter Dronke, 'The Allegorical World-Picture of Hildegard of Bingen: Reevaluations and New Problems', in Charles Burnett and Peter Dronke (eds), *Hildegard of Bingen: The Context of her Thought and Art* (London, 1998), pp. 1–16, p. 12.

21. Personification allegory is used sparingly in the early thirteenth-century romance *Tristan* by Gottfried of Strassburg. In one scene Tristan's mental struggle against falling in love with Isolde (his king's betrothed) is depicted as a conflict in which he is pulled in different directions by the opposing demands of Honour and Lady Love. See Gottfried of Strassburg, *Tristan*, ed. R. Krohn (Stuttgart, 1985), lines 11, 756–72.

22. *Cum processit* is track 4 on the CD *Canticles of Ecstasy*, by the music ensemble Sequentia, recorded in Cologne, June 1993.

23. Bowie and Davies (eds), *Hildegard of Bingen*, p. 151.

24. Katherine Kerby-Fulton, *Reformist Apocalypticism and Piers Plowman* (Cambridge, 1990).

25. A short but useful guide to Gebeno's selections from Hildegard is printed by Johannes Baptista Pitra in his *Analecta sanctae Hildegardis opera spicilegio solesme parata*, in the series *Analecta sacra*, vol. VIII (Montecassino, 1882), pp. 483–8.

26. Giles Constable, 'The Popularity of Twelfth-Century Spiritual Writers in the Late Middle Ages', in Anthony Malho and John Tedeschi (eds), *Renaissance Studies in Honor of Hans Baron* (Florence, 1971), pp. 3–28.

27. For references, see Barbara Newman, *Sister of Wisdom. St Hildegard's Theology of the Feminine* (Berkeley, CA, 1987), p. 5.

28. Noel Brann, *The Abbot Trithemius (1462–1516): The Renaissance of Monastic Humanism* (Leiden, 1981).

1. Letter to Bernard of Clairvaux

1. *[Letter 1]*: The standard numbering of the letters follows the edition of the letters by Lieven Van Acker, *Hildegardis Bingensis Epistolarium* CCCM 91–91a (Turnhout, 1991 and 1993) and the translation by Joseph L. Baird and Radd K. Ehrman, *The Letters of*

Hildegard of Bingen, 2 vols (Oxford, 1994 and 1998). This in turn follows the original manuscript arrangement of the collected correspondence in which the letters are ordered hierarchically according to the rank and importance of the correspondent. Bernard's letter is clearly significant, for it is placed first, even before the various letters to the popes.

2. *the banner of the Holy Cross… pagans*: A reference to the preparations for the Second Crusade, fought between 1147 and 1149. To 'preach the cross' meant to obtain military support for the Crusade by preaching in towns and cities throughout the country. An account of such preaching (for the Third Crusade 1189–92), and the fervent support it could inspire, is given in the first chapter of *The Journey through Wales* by Gerald of Wales, trans. Lewis Thorpe (Harmondsworth, 1978), pp. 74–7.

3. *the simple meaning… textual analysis*: Hildegard claimed a reading knowledge of Latin, as acquired perhaps gradually and subconsciously by many years of participation in the liturgy and by meditated reading of the scriptures and the Fathers of the Church. Other than learning to read the Latin psalms, she had not had access to any formal study of Latin grammar or rhetoric. For a discussion of the ways in which Hildegard could have acquired Latin, see the article by M. Atherton, 'The Visions of Hildegard and the Silent Period. A Case Study of Language Acquisition', *System* 21, no. 4 (1993), pp. 503–508.

4. *through your word*: Hildegard hopes to receive an answer to her letter which she will 'hear' when Bernard's letter is read aloud.

5. *wooden beam… world*: The wooden beam of the wine-press (itself a common image in Hildegard) is linked by a chain of association with ideas of the tree of the Garden of Eden in Genesis and the root of the race of Adam. The associative method is typical of early medieval approaches to the exegesis and interpretation of scripture but is particularly common in Hildegard. It leads to her

characteristic ‘mixed metaphors’, which occur particularly frequently in her songs.

6. *the eagle staring at the sun*: The eagle is an image from the tradition of the bestiary, the class of book popular in the medieval period in which natural history is mixed with allegorical explanation. In Hildegard’s thought, the eagle represents people who have the strength and maturity to understand the ways of God, who in turn is symbolized by the brightness of the sun and referred to traditionally as the ‘Sun of Justice’. In a short letter of *c*.1150(?) to an Abbot at Busenberg [Letter 71], Hildegard uses similar imagery: ‘The light in the light speaks to you. Be a good servant in your mind. Watch with a good will. Imitate the eagle that gazes at the sun rather than at the shadow of the shadow. Do not become tired of good works either! Instead, keep your hand on the plough with the strength of your mind. Feed your flock justly, as well as you can, with God’s help. With all your strength, run with the eagle that gazes at the light so that you are not snatched away by listlessness. Flee also the darkness of impiety, just as God makes things clear in the cause of good will. For God wants you dead to the things of the world and alive to the life of sanctification. Now live for ever.’

7. For Bernard’s reply to this letter, see 32, Letter iR to Hildegard.

2. The Action of the Will (from *Scivias*)

1. *you are not a bundle… knowledge of the scriptures*: Hildegard appears to mean: ‘As a human being you are more complex than you imagine, and you will learn this when sacred writings are explained to you.’ The phrase ‘you are not a bundle of veins’ translates the Latin *‘quae non es sarcina medullarum’*. The expression is an example of where Hildegard’s words and images remain obscure and allusive. In the previous section (I, 4, 17) she has been speaking about old

age and how the ‘bones and veins incline to weakness’, which perhaps gives a hint of her meaning.

2. *oven*: The transforming effect of intense heat is a basic assumption behind this image of the will as a fire in an oven.

3. Redemption (from *Scivias*)

1. *neither ablaze with the strength of strong lions… exhalations*: This is probably an allusion to the strength of the learning and teaching of the trained scholars, from whom Hildegard felt distanced because she was, in her own words, merely a frail, uneducated woman.

2. *a secret seal on the vision*: As the correspondence of the period shows, a seal was a standard way of ensuring secrecy for a letter. But the theme is also biblical. In Revelation 5:1, John the Divine says: ‘And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the back, close sealed with seven seals.’

3. *And I saw a light-filled man emerge*: The Latin reads *‘Vidique de eodem fulgore praefatae aurorae serenissimum hominem egredientem’*, suggesting that the figure is literally ‘the clearest man’, i.e. an image of Christ. A look at the illustration, reproduced in the Latin edition and in many books on Hildegard, is useful for understanding the iconography Hildegard herself gives on the exegesis of the image at II, 1, 13 (see below).

4. *as a woman… uneducated*: The Latin has *‘in nomine femineo indocta’*, ‘untaught in your feminine name’. The whole of this paragraph spoken by the voice from the fire provides a justification for Hildegard to continue in her work as a female visionary and divine mouthpiece. Only with such a status can she feel justified in proceeding further in the predominantly male world of literature and philosophy. Cf. her letter to Bernard of Clairvaux from about the same period (1).

5. *fickleness*: The Latin has *'petulantia'*; cf. *The Book of Life's Merits* (27) for a detailed treatment of this failing.

6.*The 'shining fire' which you see*: Hildegard conventionally presents the whole of the subsequent exegesis and explication of the vision as a transcription of the message spoken by the voice from the living fire. At intervals, we are reminded of the origin of this voice addressing Hildegard with the second person singular 'you' or speaking of 'my' inspiration; nevertheless, at least for the modern reader, it is tempting to forget this is the divine voice and to regard it as the words of Hildegard herself.

7. *'Who knoweth not… all mankind'*: Job 12:9–10.

8. *all the causes and relationships which make up its fruitfulness and fertility*: A paraphrase of the Latin *'quod uicissitudinem plenitudinis suae in illis causis ignoret in quibus fructuosa consistit'*, literally, 'that he should be ignorant of the alternation of the fullness in the causes in which fruitfulness consists'.

9. *sighs, groanings and desires for God*: Psalm 38:9: 'Lord, all my desire is before thee; and my groaning is not hid from thee.'

10. *Therefore, also, the human being contains the likeness of heaven and earth within her*: Hildegard's anthropology is broadly humanistic in its scope. Note the similar statement in *The Book of Life's Merits* VI, lines 263 and 267: 'God has perfected all his works in the human being… The human creature thus bears all thins in her body…'

11. *through the pure green vigour*: Latin *'per viriditatem suauitatis'*.

12. *the localized word*: Latin *'per locale verbum'*: human speech, which is fleeting and impermanent compared to the divine Word of creation.

13. *commands of a ruler… his commands*: Hildegard compares the word spoken by a person in authority with the strength of God's Word.

14. *the functioning word… the perfectly filled Word*: The impermanent, pragmatic, human 'word' is the capacity for speech, the crowning glory of *homo loquens* which sets human beings apart from the animal world. Opposed to it is the eternal, permanent, fully fixed, divine 'Word', the expression of the holiness and perfection of God the Father.

15. *And suddenly a dark sphere… never absent*: In this account the dark material out of which the world is made is compared to air, one of the four elements of medieval science, along with earth, fire and water. This primal matter is spherical, because it is somehow encompassed by God's power, and still dark because it is incomplete, since it has not yet collided with the divine fire of creation.

16. *'And it heated the clump of earth, turning it to flesh and blood'*: For Hildegard, heat is the important force that transforms one substance into another.

17. *earth is the material out of which human flesh is made… a mother suckling a child*: In the Genesis account of creation, God creates Adam out of the dust of the earth and breathes life into him. Hildegard retells this story in her own words and concepts. According to her, the Latin term *materia* represents the basic 'matter' of the universe, used to create human beings, but also linked by etymology with the word *mater*, 'mother'. This suggests to Hildegard the analogy of the mother suckling her child and the earth nourishing the human being.

18. *a rational human being made up of body and soul*: The idea of the wholeness of the human being clashes with the dualistic notions of the Cathars, against whom Hildegard was to preach in Cologne.

19. *Abraham, Isaac and Jacob… in their family relationship*: Hildegard's text speaks of the three prophets being linked *'carnis coniunctione'* ('by conjunction of the flesh'), in other words, they are linked on the literal level by their relationship as members of the

same family. As often in medieval exegesis of the Bible, the figures of the Old Testament are seen as prefiguring the teachings of the New. On the figurative or typological level of interpretation, therefore, the three men are seen also as signs symbolizing and prefiguring the Trinity of the New Testament.

20. *'The iniquity… O underworld'*: Cf. Hosea 13:12–14.

21. *the one who came to himself… back to his father*: At the end of the parable of the Prodigal Son, the runaway son, now suffering from hunger, decides to return: 'But when he came to himself, he said… I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight: I am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.' See Luke 15:17–32, especially 17–19, for the full parable.

22. '*This is my beloved Son*: Matthew 3:17.

23. *human reason*: Hildegard places great emphasis on human reason, or rationality (Latin *rationalitas*) in the process of salvation. See, for instance, the homilies on the Nativity (24).

4. Letter to Odo of Soissons

1. *Rheims*: Gilbert's ideas are discussed by Adelgundis Führkötter in *Hildegard von Bingen. Briefwechsel* (Salzburg, 1965), pp. 42–3. For Odo's letter to Hildegard, see 32. For another letter of dense theological content sent by Hildegard in response to a query see letter 31R, translated by Joseph L. Baird and Radd K. Ehrman, *The Letters of Hildegard of Bingen*, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1994).

2. *'I am who I am'*: Cf. Exodus 3:14.

5. The Trinity (from *Scivias*)

1. *hard-heartedness*: Latin *'obduratio'*.

2. *supremely just uniformity*: Latin *'iustissima aequitas'*.

3. *towards the end of all time*: Latin *'sub fine temporum'*.

4. *my loved one*: A traditional description associated with the apostle John.

5. *'The love of God… propitiation for our sins'*: I John 4:9–10.

6. *his most precious pearl – the human being*: On Hildegard's use of pearl imagery, see the discussion in the Introduction, III.1.

7. *In a stone there is moist greenness, palpable strength and red-burning fire*: The Latin terms are *'umida viriditas', 'palpabilis comprehensio'* and *'rutilans ignis'*. The practical uses and applications of various stones are treated more fully in Hildegard's treatise *The Book of Gemstones* (22).

8. *who comes into contact… and falls ill*: In medieval science, stones were believed to contain varying proportions of energy and moisture (fire and water), while in the medical lore of the period it was believed that an imbalance of the four elements in the human body could lead to ill-health (see 22).

9. *sound, force and breath*: The three Latin terms which Hildegard employs for the parts of the word are: *sonus, virtus*, and *flatus*. Note their different uses elsewhere. *Sonus* is the sacred 'sound' which Hildegard refers to in the letter to Bernard of Clairvaux (1), while *virtus* normally has the double sense of both 'virtue' and 'power'.

10. *the first and the last*: See Revelation 1:17.

11. *'Remember your Creator… I do not like them'*: Ecclesiastes 12: 1.

12. *the sense of life*: Hildegard's term is *'vivificatio'*.

13. *the behaviour of childhood*: Hildegard's conception of personal development from childishness to maturity may derive from St Paul; it features also in an autobiographical passage in the *Life of Hildegard* where she describes her own behaviour as a young woman struggling to cope with her visionary gift: 'then I behaved more in the character of a child than of someone of my years' (33).

6. Letter to Pope Eugenius III

1. *this writing*: A reference to Hildegard's *Scivias*.

7. Songs for Saint Disibod

1. *O mirum admirandum. Antiphon for Saint Disibod*: Pudentiana Barth and Immaculata Ritscher (eds), *Hildegard von Bingen. Lieder* (Salzburg, 1969), no. 28 and Barbara Newman (ed.), *Hildegard of Bingen. Symphonia*, 2nd edn (Ithaca, 1998), no. 41. An antiphon is a song sung by two choirs during the alternate chanting of psalms in the liturgy.

2. *O viriditas digiti dei. Responsory for Saint Disibod*: Barth and Ritscher, *Hildegard von Bingen. Lieder*, no. 29 and Newman, *Symphonia*, no. 42. A responsory is so called because the song 'responds' to a scripture reading during the church service.

8. Letter to Hartwig of Bremen

1. *Hartwig… Richardis… Hildegard*: Hildegard came into open conflict with Hartwig over the appointment of his sister Richardis as Abbess of Bassum, in the diocese of Bremen. There is no mention of this conflict here, and little in the letter allows for a precise dating.

2. *'You are gods… most high'*: Psalm 82:6. Elsewhere, Hildegard saw the reference to 'gods' as indicating a bishop's spiritual life and 'sons of the most high' as signifying his role in the pastoral care of the people of his diocese. See Letter 25R to Eberhard, Archbishop of Salzburg (30).

3. *'Who are these that fly as clouds… windows?'*: Isaiah 60:8. A common image in Hildegard, used at the beginning of *The Play of the Virtues*. See also 9, note 7.

9. Song for Saint Ursula

1. *O Ecclesia oculi tui. Sequence*: Pudentiana Barth and Immaculata Ritscher (eds), *Hildegard von Bingen. Lieder* (Salzburg, 1969), no. 54 and Barbara Newman (ed.), *Hildegard of Bingen. Symphonia*, 2nd edn (Ithaca, 1998), no. 64.

2. *like sapphire*: Cf. Ezekiel 1:26, a vision of four-winged creatures: 'Above the expanse over their heads was what looked like a throne of sapphire…'

3. *like Mount Bethel*: See Genesis 28:11–22, the story of Jacob's dream at Bethel, where he saw a stairway reaching from earth to heaven on which angels were ascending and descending; in the same vision he heard a voice promising that all peoples on earth would be blessed through his descendants.

4. *a mountain of myrrh and incense*: Song of Songs (or Song of Solomon) 4:6: 'I will go to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of incense.' See also Song of Songs 4:1–5, where the lover praises the various aspects of his bride in a series of similes which probably influenced the first few lines of Hildegard's poem. In the medieval commentary tradition, the lover of the Song of Songs was interpreted allegorically as Christ, while the bride was seen as the Church.

5. *the sound of many waters*: The same image recurs in Hildegard's writings; it derives from Ezekiel 1:24 and Revelation 1:15.

6. *'I have eagerly desired*: Cf. Luke 22:15, where Jesus says to his disciples: 'I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.'

7. *like a cloud*: An echo of Isaiah 60:8: 'Who are these that fly like clouds'.

8. *make fun of her, singing their songs*: The Latin has *'luder'*, 'to play', *'in magna symphonia'*, 'in great harmony'. As *The Book of Life's Merits* I, 5–6 shows (27), 'playfulness' is a fickle, malicious mockery, a vice

to be remedied and defeated by true ‘shame’. Sabina Flanagan, in *Hildegard of Bingen 1098–1179: A Visionary Life* (London, 1989), p. 137, interprets the passage differently, suggesting that the term *ludere* refers to games played on board ship as Ursula and her companions travelled on their pilgrimage.

9. *necklace of pearls*: I.e. Ursula and her companions.

10. *material…*: Latin *‘materia’*. A common idea in Hildegard’s writings.

10. The Trials of the Soul (from *Scivias*)

1. *Where am I in my exile?*: The Latin has *‘peregrina’*, which means both ‘pilgrim’ and ‘exile’. In the next line the soul is described as having ‘the comfort of pilgrims’. Cf. the letter to Bernard of Clairvaux, where Adam is described as *‘exsul in peregrinum mundum’*, ‘a wanderer in this exile world’. There are many echoes of the Bible: Luke 1:79, Wisdom 12:24, II Corinthians 5:4, II Peter 1:13–14. For analogous passages in other texts, particularly Gregory the Great’s *Moralia in Iob*, see the edition by Adelgundis Führkötter and Angela Carlevaris, *Scivias*, CCCM 43–43a (Turnhout, 1978), pp. 62–6.

2. *tabernacle*: The tent or tabernacle is an image of the body.

3. *gemstones*: The significance of gemstones derives from their use in the description of the heavenly Jerusalem in Revelation 21:16–21, and from the belief in their healing properties, which Hildegard described in her work *Physica* (22).

4. *the living breath*: Refers to the soul.

5. *the north*: The location of evil in Hildegard’s allegories and cosmology. The idea may derive from biblical passages such as Ezekiel 9:2.

6. *But what misfortune!… Abomination!*: Hildegard uses the Latin *‘heu’* and then the German *‘ach’* (an example of Hildegard using

German in the middle of her Latin text). Both exclamations have the force ofthe now little-used English word ‘alas’.

7. *made me eat with the pigs*: A reference to the New Testament parable of the Prodigal Son from Luke 15:11–32. For Hildegard’s interpretation of this parable, see *Scivias* II, 5, 14 (16).

8. *they laid me in a wine-press*: The image may derive from Revelation 19:15. See also the letter to Bernard (1), where Hildegard says: ‘I am unstable with the movement of the wooden beam of the wine-press in my nature’.

9. *harmonies of music*: The ‘harmonies of music’ are part of the ‘sacred sound by which all creation resounds’, a basic idea in Hildegard’s philosophy of music.

10. *and so I could not be harmed by them:* The illustration for this scene from the Rupertsberg manuscript of *Scivias* shows the kneeling figure of the soul in a square edifice topped with a tower. In the lower left a devil attempts without success to enter the door, while at top right two devils try to fire arrows at the soul. In the top left of the picture the hand of God appears in a cloud and points towards the soul, bestowing the blessing of divine protection upon her.

11. *pride:* Hildegard appears to be personifying the vice here, although this is ambiguous in the original Latin.

12. *the cave of pride of the ancient serpent*: The Latin reads: *‘superbiam antiquae speluncae’*, literally ‘the pride of the ancient cave’.

13. *‘Cast away… a new spirit’*: Ezekiel 18:31.

11. Songs for Saint Rupert

1. *O felix apparicio. Antiphon for St Rupert:* Pudentiana Barth and Immaculata Ritscher (eds), *Hildegard von Bingen. Lieder* (Salzburg, 1969), no. 35 and Barbara Newman (ed.), *Hildegard of Bingen. Symphonia,* 2nd edn (Ithaca, 1998), no. 46.

2. *O beatissime Ruperte. Antiphon for St Rupert*: Barth and Ritscher, *Hildegard von Bingen. Lieder*, no. 36 and Newman, *Symphonia*, no. 47. Newman suggests the influence of a hymn by Venantius Fortunatus (p. 294).

3. *O Jerusalem. Sequence for St Rupert*: Barth and Ritscher, *Hildegard von Bingen. Lieder*, no. 37 and Newman, *Symphonia*, no. 49. For discussions of this poem see Newman, *Symphonia*, pp. 295–8 and Peter Dronke, *Poetic Individuality in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1970), p. 168.

4. *O Jerusalem, city of gold*: Hildegard's poem alludes in various places to the description of the New Jerusalem, 'the city of pure gold', in Revelation 21.

5. *in the heat of the sun*: The feast of St Rupert falls on 15 May, the traditional month in medieval poetry for the arrival of summer.

6. *in a true revelation*: The idea of a revelation or vision suggests at once a view of the Rupertsberg from the valley floor and the vision itself in which Hildegard felt called to move there and found her community.

7. *in Loves embrace*: Another textual reading gives the translation 'in the embrace of chastity'.

8. *soared like clouds in the sky*: A recurring image in Hildegard's writings. Based on Isaiah 60:8.

12. The Departure of Richardis of Stade

1. For Heinrich's order to release Richardis, see 32, Letter 18 to Hildegard.

2. For other letters connected with the affair, see Lieven Van Acker, *Hildegardis Bingensis Epistolarium* CCCM 91–91a (Turnhout, 1991 and 1993) and the translation by Joseph L. Baird and Radd K. Ehrman, *The Letters of Hildegard of Bingen*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1994 and 1998),

Letters 4, 64, 13, 13R. Richardis apparently decided to return but unfortunately died before she could make the journey. Peter Dronke has written a sensitive study of these events in his *Women Writers of the Middle Ages.* Letter 19 in the standard collection is also interesting in its condemnation of Heinrich of Mainz around the time of his deposition from the archbishopric in 1153.

3. *zeal*: In Hildegard's writings, 'zeal' often represents the righteous anger of divine justice.

4. *'It is good… princes'*: Psalm 118:9.

13. The First Version of *The Play of the Virtues* (from *Scivias*)

1. *Play of the Virtues*: An excellent edition and translation of the final version of 1158 is Peter Dronke (ed. and trans.), *Ordo virtutum*, in his *Nine Medieval Latin Plays* (Cambridge, 1994).

2. *But a report… expensive clothes*': Letter 52 in the standard numbering. See the Latin text edited by Lieven Van Acker, *Hildegardis Bingensis Epistolarium* CCCM 91 (Turnhout, 1991 and 1993) and the translation by Joseph L. Baird and Radd K. Ehrman, *The Letters of Hildegard of Bingen*, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1994). The 'first shepherd of the Church' refers to St Paul, and the biblical quotation is from I Timothy 2:9.

3. *King of kings*: The phrase occurs in Revelation 19:16.

4. *the profound depths of the wisdom of God*: Hildegard draws on a passage of praise from Romans 11:33, which begins: 'Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God…'

5. *you express love in great measure*: As Peter Dronke shows in his edition of *The Play of Virtues* (1994, line 182) the sentence echoes Christ's words about the woman who washed his feet in Luke 7:47:

‘Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much… ’

6. *kiss of your heart*: See Song of Songs 1:2: ‘Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth…’

7. *hide your face… Creator*: Genesis 3:8: ‘Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden.’

8. *Alas, alas*: This speech later became the beginning of scene 3 of *The Play of the Virtues*, see Dronke’s edition, lines 159–60.

9. *the sheep of the Lord has fled this life*: An allusion to the parable of the Lost Sheep in Luke 15: 4–7.

10. *the lost drachma*: An allusion to the parable of the Lost Coin in Luke 15:8–10: ‘Or again, what woman with ten drachmas would not, if she lost one, light a lamp and sweep out the house and search thoroughly till she found it? And then, when she had found it, call together her friends and neighbours? “Rejoice with me,” she would say, “I have found the drachma I have lost.” In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing among the angels of God over one repentant sinner.’

11. *crown… perseverance*: Hildegard perhaps has in mind Revelation 2:10, which speaks of people who suffer imprisonment by the devil and persecution for ten days, but stay faithful and are rewarded with the ‘crown of life’.

12. *I hold a place… marriage chamber*: Cf. Scene 2 of *Play of the Virtues*, ed. Peter Dronke, in *Nine Medieval Latin Plays*, lines 68–75.

13. *awakened you under the apple tree*: Song of Songs 8:5.

14. *What is this power… in the heights*: See *Play of the Virtues*, ed. Peter Dronke, in *Nine Medieval Latin Plays*, lines 59–60.

15. *none beside God alone*: An echo of Psalm 18:31, or Psalm 17:32 (Vulgate).

16. *I will give them everything*: See the temptation of Jesus in Matthew 4:9, where the devil makes a similar speech.

17. *THE LAMENT OF THE PENITENT SOUL…VIRTUES* : The text now runs in parallel with the later *Play of the Virtues*, scenes 3 and 4, lines 159–97, 209–28, 242–51, with occasional minor changes.

18. *the Good Shepherd*: See the parable of the Lost Sheep in Luke 15:4–7 and of the Good Shepherd in John 10:11–18.

19. *covered with sores*: A phrase used to describe the beggar in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus in Luke 16:20–6.

20. *all the host of heaven will be glad for you*: An echo of the 'rejoicing in heaven' at the end of the parable of the Lost Sheep in Luke 15:4–7.

21. *to sound forth in harmony*: The Latin *'in symphonia sonare'* recalls the title *Symphonia* of Hildegard's collection of songs.

14. Three Political Letters

1. *robbers lie in wait by night*: Cf. the extract 'The unarmed youth on the road' in 16 (*Scivias* II, 3,16–17).

2. *breastplate*: Cf. the 'breastplate of righteousness' in Isaiah 59:17 and Ephesians 6:14; the 'breastplate of faith and love' in I Thessalonians 5:8; the 'breastplates of fire' in Revelation 9:17.

3. *the mystic flower… virginity*: Eugenius was originally a Cistercian monk from Clairvaux, a monastic order with a strong interest in the contemplative life.

4. *the branch of the Church*: I.e. the Papacy.

5. *bear*: On a theological level, the bear could be a symbol of the devil, but on a political level, this is likely to be a reference to the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, as Joseph L. Baird and Radd K. Ehrman suggest in the notes to their translation *The Letters of Hildegard of Bingen*.

6. *golden shoes*: The idea is perhaps biblical; cf. Ephesians 6:15, where shoes are associated with the 'gospel of peace'.

7. *choose… the better part*: Luke 10:42.

8. *Henry, Bishop of Liège*: For Henry's question to Hildegard, see 32, Letter 37.

9. *the high mountain*: An image with many connotations. The basic idea is the place of salvation, which separates light and darkness and divides good from evil. The same image occurs in the vision of the man on the mountain in *Scivias* (25) and in the vision of the cosmic egg in *Scivias* I, 3 (20).

10. *good and faithful servant*: Matthew 25:21, 23.

11. *the mud from the beautiful pearls*: Compare Hildegard's parable of the pearl in *Scivias* I, 2, 32 (see Introduction, III.1).

12. *the power of the strong key*: Cf. Matthew 16:19. 'And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.'

13. *God will not leave you*: Cf. Psalm 37:28. 'For the Lord loveth judgement, and forsaketh not his saints.'

14. *you will see in his light*: Cf. Psalm 36:9.

15. Songs for the Dedication of a Church

1. *Arnold of Brescia*: The suggestion is made by Barbara Newman in her *Sister of Wisdom* and again in her *Symphonia,* 2nd edn (Ithaca, 1998), p. 315.

2. *O virgo ecclesia. Antiphon*: Pudentiana Barth and Immaculata Ritscher (eds), *Hildegard von Bingen. Lieder* (Salzburg, 1969), no. 56 and Barbara Newman (ed.), *Hildegard of Bingen. Symphonia*, no. 66. The song uses traditional imagery of the Church as mother and bride of the King.

3. *banner of the king*: I.e. the cross.

4. *Nunc gaudeant. Antiphon*: Barth and Ritscher, *Hildegard von Bingen. Lieder*, no. 57 and Newman, *Symphonia*, no. 67. This song is the last piece in the Dendermonde manuscript.

16. Teachings on the Church (from *Scivias*)

1. *'unable and unwilling to be without it'*: Arnold of Cologne to Hildegard (Letter 14). For the full text see 32. The letter must have been written before 1156, when Rainald of Dassel succeeded Arnold as Archbishop of Cologne.

2. *'The Lord sent a word… it has lighted upon Israel'*: Isaiah 9:8.

3. *'Who are these… to their windows?'*: Isaiah 60:8. Here Hildegard comments on the relationship of the Synagogue to the Church. The final version of *The Play of the Virtues*, which was issued in 1158, should be compared with this passage. The opening section of the prologue gives another view of the same verse, for now Hildegard imagines it spoken by the prophets and patriarchs of old rather than the Synagogue:

> *PATRIARCHS AND PROPHETS:*
> Who are these? Who are these that fly as a cloud?
>
> *VIRTUES:*
> Oh holy men of Antiquity, why are you amazed at us?
> The Word of God shines bright in the form of a Man
> and so we shine with him,
> forming the limbs of his beautiful body.
>
> *PATRIARCHS AND PROPHETS:*
> We are the roots and you are the branches,
> the fruits of the living eye
> in which we were the shadow.

See also Letter II to Hartwig of Bremen, Richardis's brother (8), which uses the same verse from Isaiah.

4. *The bright radiance… hindrance*: The concept of radiance within a gemstone is reminiscent of Hildegard's treatment of gemstones in *Physica*, although the carbuncle is not included among the stones she discusses there. See 22.

5. *baptism*: The need to provide teaching on sacraments such as baptism should be seen against the background of the Cathar movement, which rejected them.

6. *ways*: Cf. the title of the book *Scivias*, usually interpreted as *scito vias*, i.e. 'know the ways.'

7. *travel on the road*: The story recalls biblical parables, but also reflects the dangers of travel in the twelfth century.

8. *'And on the morrow… I will repay thee'*: Luke 10:35, from the parable of the Good Samaritan, who helps a traveller wounded by robbers and takes him to an inn to be looked after.

9. *"Well done you good and faithful servant"*: Matthew 25:21.

10. *they are built not on rock but on sand*: A clear link to the parable from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7:24–7, where Jesus tells the story of a wise man who built his house on a foundation of rock while a foolish man built his house on sand which fell down in the next storm and flood.

11. *[On oblates]*: Oblates were children dedicated to the monastic life, often at a very early age. Despite the high regard she had for the monastic vocation, Hildegard approved of oblation only if the children were given an opportunity to decide for themselves when old enough to make decisions. For more discussion of Hildegard's imagery in this passage, see Introduction, III.1.

17. Letter to Elisabeth of Schönau

1. *One important manuscript… Villers in Brabant*: The manuscript is now preserved as Codex 9 of the library of the Benedictine

monastery at Dendermonde in Belgium.

2. *vessel… perfected in it*: Cf. II Corinthians 4:7: 'But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.'

3. *Ach! Weh!*: Hildegard's cry of dismay, equivalent to 'alas' and 'woe', is spoken in German rather than Latin.

4. *become a complete mockery*: Latin *'derideretur'*.

5. *'Thou art fairer than the children of men'*: Psalm 45:2.

6. *sun of justice*: Malachi 4:2.

7. *hour of the day*: The hours of the day were particularly important in the daily life of the monastery.

8. *soar over the clouds as though they were gods*: Isaiah 60:8 blended with Psalm 82:6. The same two biblical verses occur in the letter to Hartwig, Archbishop of Bremen (8).

9. *secrets of God*: Latin *'mystica Dei'*.

10. *the breastplate of faith* : I Thessalonians 5:8.

18. Gertrud of Stahleck

1. *bought a pearl*: Matthew 13:46. See also Hildegard's own parable of the pearl discussed in the Introduction at II.1.

2. *Gertrud*: For Gertrud's plea for help, see 32, Letter 62 to Hildegard.

3. *'the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land'*: Song of Songs 2:12.

4. *Therefore rejoice… your heart*: Zechariah 2:10 blended with Romans 8:9 or I Corinthians 3:16.

5. *'as a lily among thorns'*: Song of Songs 2:2.

6. *which the Son of God called thorns*: Luke 8:14. A reference to the parable of the Sower.

7. *a wall… pearls*: Revelation 21:18–21.

19. Letter to the Abbess of Bamberg

1. *'the first degree of humility is obedience… Christ'*: Leonard J. Doyle (trans.), *St Benedict's Rule for Monasteries* (Collegeville, MN, 1948), p. 18.

2. *Abbess of Bamberg*: For the request from the Abbess to Hildegard, see 32, Letter 61.

20. The Cosmic Egg (from *Scivias*)

1. *shaped like an egg*: The twelfth century did not believe in a flat earth. The image of the cosmos as an egg is not original to Hildegard, but she was clearly fascinated by it.

2. *The horror… stones great and small*: As Frances Beer suggests, 'the vision is ultimately reassuring because it reveals how evil can exist and, at the same time as it is part of the creation, be counterbalanced and controlled by the forces of good'. See her *Women and Mystical Experience in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 1992), p. 46.

3. *between the north and the east… a great mountain… towards the east*: The great mountain separates good in the east from evil in the north.

4. *Through his creation… eternal things*: This is Hildegard's explanation for her allegorical approach, namely that the works of creation can be understood not only as phenomena of nature, but also as symbols illustrating the history of the faith.

5. *The elements… render them their service*: The elements in medieval science are earth, air, fire (i.e. energy) and water; all are involved in human physiology, and for Hildegard the human being is seen as being at one with the world, as part of a positive view of nature and ecology.

6. *‘Thou hast crowned him… the works ofthy hands’*: From Psalm 8:5–6.

21. The Cosmos (from *Causes and Cures*)

1. *he was always life*: See John 1:3–4.

2. *still unformed*: Cf. Genesis 1:2: ‘And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep.’

3. *‘Let there be light’*: Genesis 1:3.

4. *the light of the air which we can see*: As in the vision of the cosmic egg in *Scivias*, the air forms a sublunary atmosphere, i.e. below the level of the moon’s orbit, while the ether is a higher, superlunary layer above the level of the moon.

5. *The fall of Lucifer*: Many of the ideas in this passage go back to the biblical verses on the same topic in Isaiah 14:12–15. A similar set of ideas about Lucifer occurs in *The Book of Life’s Merits* VI, 14, treated there for their moral significance rather than as part of a cosmology, as here.

6. *his envy of God*: As Margret Berger points out in her *Hildegard of Bingen. On Natural Philosophy and Medicine* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 24, this phrase could also be interpreted as ‘God’s punitive zeal’. Although such a phrase does not fit the context so well, it occurs in other writings of Hildegard, for instance in *The Book of Life’s Merits*.

7. *within every human being all things lie concealed*: There are parallels to this idea in Erigena’s *Periphyseon* (755B) and Honorius of Autun’s *Clavis physicae* (n. 241); see Margret Berger, *Hildegard of Bingen*, p. 24.

8. *ancient counsel… man*: Hildegard’s notion of the ‘ancient counsel’ indicates her belief in the ‘absolute predestination of Christ’, the doctrine that Christ would have become man whether or not the Fall had taken place.

9. *fire of judgement… stench and cold*: In one of the plagues described in Exodus 9:23–4, hail falls during a thunderstorm, and fire runs along the ground. In other words, there is the stench of the fire mingled with the cold of the hail.

10. *the wings of the power of God*: Cf. Psalm 104:3.

11. *bring their song back into harmony*: The Latin reads *'cantum in symphonia ferent'*, which connects this idea with Hildegard's 'Symphonia', and the notion of heavenly harmony in her theology of music.

12. *bad humours… illness*: According to the humoral physiology of ancient and medieval medicine, the human body was made up of four humours in balance. According to the theory in its simplest terms, illness is caused either by an imbalance of humours or by bad humours. See Margret Berger, *Hildegard of Bingen*, p. 15.

13. *the sun's heat is greater… above it*: A good instance of the twelfth-century belief in a spherical earth, with the sun orbiting round it. In winter, according to this view, the other side of the earth is warmer in order to keep the temperature as a whole in balance.

14. *immoderation*: A lack of balance. In the Hildegardian cosmos, everything must moderate itself to the mean.

15. *a loadstone attracting iron to it*: The text has *'achates'*, i.e. 'agate', the wrong kind of stone. There may have been a scribal error, with *'achates'* being written instead of *'magnes'*; see Margret Berger, *Hildegard of Bingen*, p. 29.

16. *The sun precedes… the day… the moon precedes… the night…* : The idea is adapted from Genesis 1:16–18: 'And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also. And God set them in the firmament of heaven to give light upon the earth, and to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that it was good.' See also Psalm 136:8–9:

‘The sun to rule by day: for his mercy endureth for ever. The moon and stars to rule by night: for his mercy endureth for ever.’

22. Gemstones (from *Physica*)

1. *[bewitched]… out of their mind*: Compare this cure for enchantment with Hildegard’s parable condemning the use of the magic arts in *Scivias* I, 3 (see Introduction at II.1).

23. Songs from *Symphonia*

1. *O magne pater. Antiphon*: See Barbara Newman (ed.), *Hildegard of Bingen. Symphonia*, 2nd edn (Ithaca, 1998), no. 6. In her useful notes to this song, Newman suggests that it is influenced by Genesis 2:18.

2. *O eterne deus. Antiphon*: Newman, *Symphonia,* no. 7. The song is based on the idea in Ephesians 1:22–3 that Christ is appointed to be head over the Church, which is his body and limbs. This is then combined with an image of the first dawn derived from Psalm 110:3.

3. *Ave Maria. Responsory*: Newman, *Symphonia*, no. 8.

4. *O clarissima mater. Responsory*: Newman, *Symphonia*, no. 9. The ‘star of the sea’ is a traditional image for Mary.

5. *O splendidissima gemma. Antiphon*: Newman, *Symphonia*, no. 10. Adam of St Victor uses the same image of the gem in a sequence for Christmas.

6. *Hodie aperuit. Antiphon*: Newman, *Symphonia*, no. 11. A song in which several very different images (gate, woman, dawn, flower) are presented in rapid succession. The idea of the ‘closed gate’ derives from a vision in Ezekiel 44:2-3 where the prophet sees a gate shut after the Lord has passed through it and hears that ‘the prince himself is the only one who may sit inside the gateway to eat

in the presence of the Lord'. The serpent and the woman are from the story of Eve in the Garden of Eden. The Dendermonde manuscript begins the song with the very specific word '*hodie*', 'today', rather than '*nunc*', 'now', of other versions.

7. *Quia ergo femina. Antiphon*: Newman, *Symphonia*, no. 12. Newman (p. 273) argues that the '*ergo*' shows that this is a sequel to the preceding antiphon. The 'form of a woman' is both the Platonic idea and also a suggestion of weakness, as in the openings of Hildegard's letters and visionary works.

8. *Cum processit factura. Antiphon*: Newman, *Symphonia*, no. 13. There is a textual crux in the reading 'joys of life' (*'gaudia vite'*) rather than 'joys in you' (*'gaudia in te'*).

9. *O virga ac diadema. Sequence*: Newman, *Symphonia*, no. 20. From an anecdote in the Canonization Protocol, there is evidence to suggest that this sequence was a particular favourite of Hildegard. See 35, paragraph 9.2 of the Protocol.

10. *Spiritus sanctus vivificans vita. Antiphon*: Newman, *Symphonia*, no. 24.

11. *Caritas abundat. Antiphon*: Newman, *Symphonia*, no. 25. An alternative medieval spelling of the title is *Karitas habundat*.

12. *O gloriosissimi. Antiphon*: Newman, *Symphonia*, no. 29.

13. *O speculum columbe. Antiphon for John the Evangelist*: Newman, *Symphonia*, no. 35. 'The beloved son of the Lamb' refers to the description 'one of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved' in John 13:23.

14. *O dulcis electe. Responsory for John the Evangelist*: Newman, *Symphonia*, no. 36. The phrase translated as 'on the greenness of the pastors of the Church' (Latin '*in viriditate pigmentariorum*') picks up the Hildegardian image of priests as 'perfumers.'

15. *O vis aeternitatis. Responsory*: Newman, *Symphonia*, no. 1. The Dendermonde manuscript lacks a few pages at the beginning and it

is possible that this song was the initial piece. See the journal article by Peter Dronke, 'The Composition of Hildegard of Bingen's *Symphonia', Sacris Erudiri* 19 (1969–70), pp. 381–93.

16. *O virtus sapientie*: Newman, *Symphonia*, no. 2. For a discussion of the themes of this song see Introduction II.4. The ideas of the sapiential literature of the Apocrypha lie behind this text, particularly Wisdom of Solomon 8:1, which reads: 'Wisdom reacheth from one end to another mightily: and sweetly doth she order all things' and Ecclesiasticus 24:5–6, where Wisdom speaks: 'I alone compassed the circuit of heaven, and walked in the bottom of the deep. In the waves of the sea, and in all the earth, and in every people and nation, I got a possession.'

24. Two Christmas Homilies

1. *[Pitra (ed., homilies IIi and Ilii]*: The Latin text used is from J. B. Pitra (ed.), *Analecta sanctae Hildegardis opera, in Analecta Sacra*, vol. 8 (Montecassino, 1882), pp. 247–9.

2. *For the first mass*: This homily is intended to explain the Gospel reading for the first mass on Christmas Day.

3. *ancient counsel*: The term used in Hildegard's theology for the divine plan from before the creation. In giving allegorical meanings to the passage, Hildegard follows in the tradition of the commentaries of Bede and Gregory the Great, who see Caesar Augustus as representing God; but she adds a cosmological reading which is strongly influenced by Neoplatonism. See the detailed analysis in Peter Dronke, 'Platonic-Christian Allegories in the Homilies of Hildegard of Bingen', in Haijo Jan Westra (ed.), *From Athens to Chartres. Neoplatonism and Medieval Thought. Studies in Honour of Edouard Teaunea* (Leiden, 1992), pp. 281–96.

25. The Iron Mountain (from *Scivias*)

1. *‘He becometh poor… maketh rich’*: Proverbs 10:4.

26. The Man Looking East and South (from *The Book of Life's Merits*)

1. *And I saw…*: Hildegard begins her vision appropriately with an opening formula that recalls the writings of the biblical prophets; cf. Ezekiel 1:4 or Revelation 5:1, 6, 11. Note also the alliteration of the /v/ consonants in the original Latin *'Et vidi virum'*.

2. *stood… turned… looked*: Various important aspects of the Latin text do not come over in a modern English translation: in this paragraph, there is the end rhyme '-bat', '-at' on the last three verbs, as well as a rhythmical balance and cadence: *'supra abyssum stabat. Et se ad orientem verterat, ita quod et orientem et austrum inspiciebat'*. Such acoustic and rhetorical features were calculated to please the medieval reader, who more often than not listened to the text being read aloud, or murmured it quietly during the act of reading. Though Hildegard's Latin may not be conventional by the classical standards of the 'twelfth-century Renaissance' (and her secretary Volmar may in fact have edited and corrected her Latin case-endings and conjugations), nevertheless she is clearly in full control of both her content and her medium of its expression.

3. *writing tablet*: The Latin *tabula* is here translated as 'writing tablet'. Parchment was expensive and paper unavailable in this period. The essential note-taking tool since Roman times had been a wooden frame filled with wax that was used in conjunction with a metal writing stylus; the writing on the soft wax could be erased and the tablet reused. In the opening illustration of the Rupertsberg codex of *Scivias* (and in many of the illustrations of the Lucca manuscript of *The Book of Divine Works*), the figure of Hildegard is depicted in the act of receiving the vision and writing it down on her tablet; only her secretary (Volmar) is seen actually using pen, ink and parchment.

4. *knowledge of God*: Note here also the characteristic Hildegardian theological term '*scientia Dei*', 'knowledge of God'.

5. *one sound*: By repetition of the adjective 'one', Hildegard rings the changes on the concept of unity: 'one life… one will… one conjunction… one devotion… one sound' (Latin *'uno sono'*). The latter phrase has been translated 'with one sound', but Hildegard must mean that the 'host of blessed spirits' blend their voices to sing in unison, a type of musical experience with which she was very familiar from her own songs and settings for the liturgy. The notion of the 'sound' of all varieties of music occurs in the letter to Bernard of Clairvaux (i).

6. *aforementioned*: The frequent adjective 'aforementioned' or 'aforesaid' (*'praedictus'*) is strange to modern ears, but serves to orient the medieval audience and prompt their memories as they listen to the reading of the text.

7. *trumpet blast*… *habitations*: Hildegard's vocabulary is heavily influenced by that of Revelation, Ezekiel and other apocalyptic and visionary writings. Cf. Revelation 8:12–13.

8. *lion*… *goat*: The words for 'lion' and 'goat' are *leo* and *capricornus*, both signs of the zodiac; they are referred to here not necessarily for any astrological meaning but rather for their astronomical and symbolic significance. The twelve signs of the zodiac are, it will be recalled, positions within the belt of stars in the night sky against which observers can plot the changing position of the sun at the various times of the year.

9. *the 'misleader'*: The Latin for 'leader', *dux*, is derived from the same root form *duco*, 'I lead', as *seductor*, hence the translation 'misleader'. Hildegard is using etymology to emphasize her point.

10. *a cloud coming from the North*: The North is the region of the world associated with the devil; the cloud that originates there is described as '*aridus*', an apt choice of adjective to represent evil and a term which in Hilldegard's works contrasts effectively with her

important and frequently encountered notion of '*viriditas*', or 'greenness', as used for instance in this text in Mercy's speech against the fourth figure, Hardness of Heart (see The Book of Life's Merits I, 8).

11. *ancient serpent*: The 'serpent' is of course the devil, as in the account of the Fall in the biblical Genesis. 'Ancient Enemy' ('*antiquus hostis*') is a traditional term for the devil in medieval literature, with origins in patristic commentaries and sermons.

12. *the images… of vices*: Here, as also in her exegesis, Hildegard stresses the symbolic nature of her vision; she sees symbolic images of vices rather than actual creatures, and among the forms she sees, she chooses to focus on seven.

27. The Seven Vices and Virtues (from *The Book of Life's Merits*)

1. *The Wonders of the East*: See Richard Stoneman, *Legends of Alexander the Great* (London, 1994), pp. 20–24.

2. *So why dry up… for shame!*: The Latin style is worthy of note in this passage. Though not a poem as such, it is remarkable for its strong rhythms and the AB AB AAA rhyme-scheme of its verbs, as well as other internal rhymes in *-um*; note also the alliteration on the [k] sounds as represented by the letters <c> and <q>:

'Et quare arescerem, cum omnem viriditatem habeam? Cur quasi in senili etate viverem, cum in iuventute floream? Quare pulchrum visum oculorum in cecitate ducerem? Quod si hoc facerem, erubescerem.'

['So why dry up when I possess all power of greenness? Why live in senile old age, when I can flourish in youthfulness? Why keep in the dark the beautiful vision of the eyes? If I did that, I would blush for shame!']

The language seems to echo and reinforce to the semi-aggressive statements of *amor seculi*. With an unmistakable and distinct voice, Love of the World is characterized here as a kind of elemental wild man, speaking about positive forces such as 'greenness' but misusing them – in Hildegard's view – for false purposes. This feature of a vice using the language of virtue to deceive her audience is also found in Prudentius's *Psychomachia*.

3. *I heard a voice respond to the first figure*: The voice of the first virtue, 'Heavenly Love'.

4. *The second figure… prey*: The dog Hildegard depicts here appears to be a kind of coursing-hound or hunting-dog. As emerges in the later exegesis which follows the narrative of the vices, the second figure represents *petulantia*, which could be translated as 'Fickleness', since the vice is described as chasing after whims and

deceiving people with fine talk about laughter. The Latin word also has connotations of 'impudence', a personality feature which also emerges – at least in part – in the characterization of the figure here, for instance in the fact that the vice entices people then deals them serious wounds.

5. *I heard a voice*: As we learn later in the book, the virtue 'True Discipline' is speaking here.

6. *The third figure… clothing*: The third vice represents *ioculatrix*, 'Superficiality', 'Jocularity' or 'Amusemen', a kind of superficial lack of gravity which the voice from the cloud condemns as 'idolatry'. As with the other vices that employ the vocabulary of virtue to beautify their own speeches and actions, Superficiality attempts to make himself attractive to his listeners by evoking the joy of heaven and using this to justify his own behaviour.

7. *the response of the voice from the storm-cloud*: Spoken by the virtue 'Shame'.

8. *The fourth figure… motionless*: The fourth image, the cloud of smoke, represents *obduratio*, Hardness of Heart'.

9. *So why should I labour… to pieces?*: Note the rhyming prose in the original Latin (lines 194–5): *'Quare ergo causa ullius laborarem, et me dilacerarem?'* ('Why should I labour for any good cause? Why tear myself to pieces?').

10. *the voice from the aforementioned storm-cloud*: The fourth virtue is 'True Mercy'.

11. *the stone presents its moisture*: The idea of 'perspiration' in stones is explicable as part of the medieval notion of the four elements, namely: earth (i.e. solid matter), air (gases), fire (energy) and water (moisture), each of which is found in varying quantities in every created thing. See *The Book of Gemstones* in 22.

12. *The fifth figure… whole head*: The fifth vice is *ignavia*, 'Lack of Spirit'. This figure with a large ear covering all its head is

reminiscent of creatures with grotesquely exaggerated limbs in the *Marvels of the East* tradition.

13. *the response of the voice from the storm-cloud*: The fifth virtue is 'Divine Victory'.

14. *The sixth figure… burning brands*: The sixth vice, *ira*, 'Anger', has flames issuing from its mouth like the monsters of legend, while the firebrands recall depictions of Anger in the traditional illustrations of vices in manuscripts of Prudentius's *Psychomachia*.

15. *the response ofthe voice from the storm-cloud*: The sixth virtue is 'Divine Patience'; patience is the traditional remedy for anger in the psychomachia tradition.

16. *The seventh figure… quite naked*: The seventh vice is *inepta letitia*, 'Foolish Joy'. Similarities will be noted between the individual members of this group of seven sins; here in particular Foolish Joy recalls the first, second and third figures of vice, yet also follows on from the preceding figure 'Anger', as Hildegard explains later, 'because when a person shows joy after being angry, he humiliates his enemies, who feel the insults heaped upon them all the more strongly when they see him happy'.

17. *the response of the voice from the storm-cloud*: The seventh virtue is 'Desire for God'.

28. The Voice from Heaven (from *The Book of Life's Merits*)

1. *black schism*: Possibly a reference to the eighteen-year schism between Pope Alexander III and Emperor Frederick Barbarossa which began in 1159, shortly after Hildegard had started work on *The Book of Life's Merits*.

2. *man… lion… ox… eagle… four*: The four images of the man, the lion, the bull and the eagle from Ezekiel 1:10 were traditionally interpreted as symbols of the four evangelists, for instance in the iconography of the illuminated gospel books of the early Middle Ages. In Hildegard these become theological symbols, each using traditional animal imagery to illustrate aspects of God: his goodness, power, sacrifice, and knowledge.

3. *The work of the activity of God…from God*: The same idea is basic to the third book of the trilogy, *The Book of Divine Works*.

4. *For he alone knows all things… grace*: Hildegard has a strong sense of immanence, that God is present and actively at work in the world.

5. *'The Lord… his enemies'*: Isaiah 42:13. Hildegard has taken the image of the 'mighty man' from Isaiah and adapted it to her own vision, as she explains in the following paragraphs.

6. *Before the ancient days… destruction*: A contrast is made between the heights of the Lord's power – as life to the living – and the carelessness of Pride 'who attempts to climb before he has seen the ladder'. Note also in this passage the key concept of the 'ancient counsel' or plan that has been prepared beforehand against the forces of pride.

7. *But he prepared his quiver and arrows… Man of war*: This is the traditional patristic image of the devil as an archer (Psalm 11:2 in the Authorized Version), here attempting to have his revenge for the fall from heaven.

8. *He then took up 'the Word… never cease*: The idea that 'the Lord shall go forth as a mighty man' is linked now to the incarnation of Christ, when 'the Word… became flesh' (John 1:14). The battle with the enemy is seen as one of active good against idle and inactive evil, and the text becomes a prophecy of the apocalypse.

9. *The Man is of such stature'… and no end*: At this point Hildegard returns to the details of the opening vision and explains them step by step, beginning with some reflections for the reader on how the eternity of God is to be understood.

10. *God is eternal… a flaming fire in judgement*: By a series of associated images Hildegard connects eternity with fire, God's power, rational thought, the senses, and judgement. A key influence is Psalm 104, the hymn to creation and renewal from the Psalms, especially the verse 'Who maketh… his ministers a flaming fire' (Psalm 104: 4; Authorized Version).

11. *Before the time of the Law… any other kind of law*: The figure of the Man in the original vision is now employed allegorically for a discussion of salvation history and the purgation of sin. In the allegory, the shoulders of the man represent the law of Moses, as in the biblical verse Hildegard is about to discuss in paragraph 26, 'the government shall be upon his shoulder' (Isaiah 9:6).

12. *on the shoulder of his strength*: Hildegard's style here is extremely allusive and associative, but the main message seems to be that the shoulder is a symbol for the strength and justice of Christ.

13. *without the venomous seed of a man*: The doctrine of the 'venomous seed of a man' contrasts with more positive views of sexuality, for instance in Hildegard's *Causes and Cures*.

14. *the Old Law was the sound and shadow of the word… Christ, then appeared*: Hildegard shows some acquaintance with reflections on language, in particular the difference between a word as an abstract meaning-bearing entity and the spoken word as a sound perceived by the senses and subject to the limitations of time and space.

Hildegard's source, however, remains unclear, for unlike many early medieval writers she does not cite whole passages from her authorities. Ultimately, the influence of Augustine is apparent, for instance his musings on time, speech, memory and the Word in Books X and XI of his *Confessions*. In a relevant passage in Book XI, chapter 6 translated by Pine-Coffin (Harmondsworth, 1961, p. 258), Augustine addresses God as follows:

> But how did you speak? Did you speak as you did when your voice was heard in the clouds saying: *This is my beloved Son?* At that time your voice sounded and then ceased. It was speech with a beginning and an end. Each syllable could be heard and then died away, the second following after the first and the third after the second, and so on in sequence until the last syllable followed all the rest and then gave place to silence. […] These words, which you had caused to sound in time, were reported by the bodily ear of the hearer to the mind, which has intelligence and inward hearing responsive to your eternal Word.

15. *the sound and the word came together… in agreement*: By contrast to the Old Testament, under the New Law the sound and meaning word become inseparable, a theme touched on further below.

16. *the Old Law was in shadow… anything different*: An analogy is made between the shadowy existence in the Law of the Old Testament period and the shadowy existence of the souls of the saints awaiting the resurrection of the body.

17. *From his knees to the calves of his legs he is in the earth.'… their sustenance*: Hildegard draws an analogy between the supporting knees of the cosmic Man and the sustaining strength of the earth, both of which can flex under pressure and then return afterwards to their 'rightful condition'.

18. *So also the Church… endure invincible*: Having set up the image of the flexible knees, Hildegard now applies it on a prophetic level to the 'New Nation', that is the Church, which will come under pressure during the time of the Antichrist and yet in the end endure invincible.

19. *She will stand firmly on her feet*: Just as the cosmic Man 'rests in his mysteries', so the Church in the last days will 'stand firmly on

her feet'.

20. *'Who hath measured… depth of the abyss?'* : From the Old Testament Apocrypha – the book of wisdom literature known as Ecclesiasticus (or Sirach) 1:3.

21. *It was Wisdom… penetrated the abyss*: In Ecclesiasticus 24:5, Wisdom speaks: 'I alone compassed the circuit of heaven, and walked in the bottom of the deep.'

22. *your ways are true and just*: See Revelation 16:7. In the passage following, the biblical quotation is expanded into a long prayer spoken on behalf of erring humanity who need to realize the truth that the Lord's 'judgements are true and just'.

23. *the mountain, which is the knowledge of God*: The image of the mountain as the knowledge of God can be compared with the mountain in *Scivias* I, 1 (25), or in the description of the cosmic egg in *Scivias* I, 3 (20), or in the letters to Henry, Bishop of Liège or Prior Dimo (14, 30).

24. *'He heard hidden words, which it is not permitted for anyone to speak'*: II Corinthians 12:4. Hildegard at no point states clearly that the man 'caught up into paradise' in this verse refers to the Apostle Paul, which is the traditional view of this passage. Instead, Hildegard expands on the notion of 'hidden words' that are revealed to visionaries, as in her own case, and it is tempting to relate this passage to her short treatise on the 'unknown language' which she wrote in the 1150s before starting on *The Book of Life's Merits*.

29. The Unknown Language

1. *examples… of interest*: Taken from Jean-Baptiste Pitra (ed.), *Sanctae Hildegardis opera*, in *Analecta sacra*, vol. 8 (Montecassino, 1882), p. 497.

2. *word formation*: The root *aieg* seems to be important, as do the endings *-nz* and *-iz*. Other examples not listed above suggest

influence from Latin or German, e.g. *vanix*, 'woman', perhaps from Latin *vanitas*, 'vanity', *falschin*, 'poet', perhaps from Middle High German *valsch*, 'false', and *sonziz*, 'apostle', possibly related to the *sonus* or 'sacred sound' to which Hildegard frequently referred. For more information on Hildegard's language, see Marie-Louise Portmann and Alois Odermatt (eds), *Wörterbuch der unbekannten Sprache* [Dictionary of the Unknown Language] (Basel, 1986).

3. See note 24 to 28.

4. *The original text… English translation*: Pudentiana Barth and Immaculata Ritscher (eds), *Hildegard von Bingen. Lieder* (Salzburg, 1969), no. 67 and Barbara Newman (ed.), *Hildegard of Bingen. Symphonia*, 2nd edn (Ithaca, 1998), no. 68; for a discussion of the song, see Newman, *Symphonia*, pp. 316–17.

30. Allegorical Letters

1. *Abbess of Altena…*: See 32, Letter 49 for the abbess's bid for friendship.

2. *abbess and teacher*: Latin *'magistra'*.

3. *'Behold, the lion… prevailed'*: Revelation 5:5.

4. *into the abyss*: II Peter 2:4.

5. *With rending teeth he drives all injustice from him*: Cf. Psalm 34:16 (Vulgate) or Psalm 35:16 (Authorized Version).

6. *Eberhard, Archbishop of Salzburg…*: See Eberhard's letter to Hildegard (32, Letter 25).

7. *'You are gods… sons of the most High'*: Psalm 81:6 (Vulgate) or 82:6 (Authorized Version); the verse is referred to by Jesus in John 10:34.

8. *the circuit of the heaven*: Ecclesiasticus 24:5.

9. *Love is my matter*: Hildegard's idea of creation from 'matter', or material, includes the idea of the maternal, i.e. the image of the

mother bearing a child.

10. *he who is*: Exodus 3:14.

11. *Adam of Ebrach…* : For Adam's letter to Hildegard, see 32, Letter 85.

12. *she had in her right hand… moon*: Cf. Revelation 1:16.

13. *I begot thee*: Psalm 109:3 (Vulgate). This differs from the text of the Authorized Version (Psalm 110:3).

14. *Love*: In the sense of charity, Latin *caritas*.

15. *base matter*: Latin *'materia'*, with connotations of *mater*, 'mother'.

16. *'Let it be done'*: Latin *'fiat'*, as in Genesis 1:3, 'Let there be light'.

17. *The Lord said… at my right hand'*: Psalm 109:1 (Vulgate) or 110:1 (Authorized Version).

18. *the ancient of days*: Daniel 7:9.

19. *'Increase…fill the earth'*: Genesis 1:28.

20. *Humility redeemed him*: There is a strong association between the earth, humility and humanity in writings on this theme.

21. *the eye of love… heavenly love*: Latin *'caritas'* and *'amor'* respectively.

22. *Love and Humility*: The text has Love and Obedience knocking at the door, but this may be an error. The allegory makes better sense if the knight Obedience is sitting in the house, and the two maidens Love and Humility are at the door.

23. *you will never be… confounded*: Latin: *'nec morte morieris'*.

31. A Vision of Love (from *The Book of Divine Works*)

1. *'Fiat, let there be…'*: From the Vulgate text of Genesis 1:3.

32. Queries and Requests: Selected Letters to Hildegard

1. *correspondents*: Further information on the recipients and personalities involved is given in the Glossary. For convenience, the letters selected have been numbered according to the edition by Lieven Van Acker, *Hildegardis Bingensis Epistolarium* CCCM 91–91a (Turnhout,1991 and 1993) and the translation by Joseph L. Baird and Radd K. Ehrman, *The Letters of Hildegard of Bingen*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1994 and 1998). Van Acker's arrangement follows the hierarchical ranking of the letters as preserved in the major manuscript collection, rather than the order in which they were written. Since many of the letters cannot be dated precisely, the chronological order attempted in this selection should be seen as only approximate.

2. *Bernard of Clairvaux…*: For Hildegard's request for support, see 1, Letter 1.

3. *'God opposes… the humble'*: Proverbs 3:34, quoted in James 4:6 and I Peter 5:5.

4. *Odo of Soissons…*: For Hildegard's reply, see 4.

5. *'The king… chamber'*: Song of Songs 1:4.

6. *my secret to myself*: Isaiah 24:16 (Vulgate text).

7. *King Hezekiah… angered the Lord*: See Isaiah 39:2–8. Odo is using the example of Hezekiah to warn Hildegard against the dangers of revealing spiritual treasures to opponents.

8. *place certain things under a seal*: A book is placed under a seal in Revelation 5:1. The idea is common also in Hildegard's writings.

9. *'the woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praise'*: Proverbs 31:30.

10. *the melodies of a new song*: The allusion to Hildegard's compositions shows that she was already writing songs by the late 1140s.

11. *many scholars argue that God is not identical with both paternity and divinity*: This was one of the theses of Gilbert Porreta, Bishop of Poitiers.

12. *Heinrich, Archbishop of Mainz…*: For Hildegard's aggressive reply, see 12.

13. *a sister… in your monastery*: The reference is to Richardis of Stade.

14. *Henry, Bishop of Liège…*: For Hildegard's reply, see 14.

15. *Arnold, Archbishop of Cologne…*: Hildegard's short reply is quoted in the introduction to 16.

16. *the book… interference*: A reference to *Scivias*, probably the most widely known of Hildegard's books during her lifetime.

17. *Gertrud (of Stahleck)…*: Hildegard sent an encouraging response; see 18.

18. *'things… heart of man'*: I Corinthians 2:9.

19. *the wine of sorrow* : I follow here the translation by Baird and Ehrman, in *The Letters*, vol. 1.

20. *the one whom I desire*: Song of Songs 2:3: 'As the apple tree among the trees of the woods, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow whom I desired: and his fruit was sweet to my palate.'

21. *Abbess of… Bamberg…*: For Hildegard's reply see 19.

22. *An Abbess of Altena…*: Hildegard's response is allegorical and does not quite match the personal tone of the abbess's letter; see 30, Letter 49R.

23. *sitting with Mary at the feet of Christ*: Probably a reference to Mary Magdalene (see Matthew 27:61); the imagery of Christ the beloved derives from interpretations of the Song of Songs.

24. *secret chamber of your heart*: Perhaps a reference to the story of Judith in the Old Testament Apocrypha. See, for instance, Judith 8:5 in the Jerusalem Bible.

25. *tasted… sweet*: Psalm 34:8.

26. *face to face*: I Corinthians 13:12.

27. *Eberhard, Archbishop of Salzburg…*: For the allegory Hildegard wrote in response, see 30, Letter 25R.

28. *you will enter… heavenly bridegroom*: An allusion to the parable of the Five Wise Virgins, who bought oil for their lamps so that when the bridegroom came they were ready, and 'they went in with him to the marriage', while the five foolish virgins remained outside, with no oil for their lamps. See Matthew 25:1–12.

29. *the Emperor's court at Mainz*: Emperor Frederick Barbarossa held royal audiences at various intervals in different locations throughout the empire. This occasion, in 1163, was particularly important for Hildegard because she received an imperial deed of protection for the Rupertsberg convent. Eberhard's name appears among the many names of witnesses to the deed, which also include Archbishop Conrad of Mainz, Archbishop Eberhard of Bamberg and Bishop Henry of Liège.

30. *under a seal*: Eberhard wants a sealed letter in reply for extra security. He himself was in a difficult political situation: as a friend of the Emperor, he nevertheless supported Pope Alexander III against the antipope Victor IV.

31. *Abbot Adam…*: Adam's letter provoked a fascinating letter in reply; see 30, Letter 85R/A.

32. *rejoiced with a great joy* : The wording is biblical. Cf. Matthew 2:10: 'And seeing the great star, they rejoiced with exceeding great

joy.’

33. *allow your voice to be heard in our land*: A reference to Hildegard’s first preaching tour, between 1158 and 1161.

33. From *The Life of Hildegard*, Book 2, by Theoderich of Echternach

1. *She revealed certain things about the nature of the human being… such things*: A reference to the work now known as two separate books: *Causes and Cures* and *Physica*.

2. *in marvellous harmony*: The Latin word used is *'symphonia'*, the same word occurring in the title of Hildegard's collected songs, *The Symphony of the Harmony of Celestial Relations*.

3. *other typological expositions*: This refers to Hildegard's commentaries on the Creed and the Benedictine Rule.

4. *key of David… no man openeth*': Revelation 3:7.

5. '*the king hath brought her to his storerooms*': See Song of Songs 1:3 (Douay-Rheims translation following the Latin Vulgate) or Song of Songs 1:4 (Authorized Version).

6. *'inebriated with the plenty of his house'*: See Psalm 35:9 (Vulgate), or the slightly different text in the Authorized Version (Psalm 36:8).

7. *she will conceive… over the earth*: Cf. Isaiah 26:18.

8. *as her fellow initiate*: Here Volmar, Hildegard's secretary, is referred to as a *'symmista'*, i.e. someone else who had been initiated into heavenly mysteries.

9. *he who has the file… human ears'*: Volmar's work as a scribe is here described with the conventional image of the grammarian as a craftsman who files down the rough metal and so polishes the style of the Latin.

10. *'My beloved… of my being'*: Song of Songs 5:4 (cf. the texts of the Vulgate and Jerusalem Bible). This same text was also used by Rupert of Deutz to justify his own visionary experiences.

11. *I was offered to God for the spiritual life*: Hildegard joins Jutta, either at her household or at the anchorage.

34. Gebeno of Eberbach: The *Pentachronon*

1. *Gebeno… Hildegard's letter*: Since the *Pentachronon* is unpublished, information on Gebeno's selections is printed only in Jean Baptiste Pitra (ed.), *Analecta sanctae Hildegardis opera spicilegio solesme parata*, in the series *Analecta sacra*, vol. VIII (Montecassino, 1882), pp. 483–8.

2. *[Conrad III to Hildegard]*: The texts of this letter and Hildegard's reply are printed in PL 97, 185A-186B.

3. *my son… succeed me*: In the end Conrad nominated his nephew, Frederick Barbarossa, to succeed him in 1152.

35. From the Canonization Protocol

1. *Abbess of Rupertsberg*: The official title of the abbess is *magistra* (mistress), as it was in Hildegard's time.

2. *Seguwize… Hildegard*: The story of how Seguwize was eventually healed of demon possession is told in the *Life of Hildegard*, Book 3, 20–22.

3. *tertian or quartan fever*: A tertian is the kind of fever that recurs every other day (by inclusive reckoning every third day, hence the name tertian). A quartan is a fever that recurs, by inclusive reckoning, every fourth day. For information on medieval views of the causes of such fevers, see the introduction to Margret Berger, *Hildegard of Bingen. On Natural Philosophy and Medicine* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 16.

4. *The more reasonable part*: The Latin has *'sanior'*, here translated 'more reasonable'.

5. *O virga ac diadema* : 'O branch and diadem', one of Hildegard's sequences dedicated to Saint Mary.

6. *all the masters… theology*: A reference to the lecturers of the schools of Paris, which at this stage were developing into the medieval university of Paris.

7. *twelve books*: The twelve ‘books’ could be the three parts of *Scivias*, the six parts of *The Book of Life’s Merits* and the three of *The Book of Divine Works*.

8. *William of Auxerre…* : The mention of William of Auxerre, who became a master at Paris in about 1210 and died in Rome perhaps in 1231, helps to give an approximate date to the events recorded here.

GLOSSARY

ABELARD, PETER (c. 1079–c. 1142) Brilliant and controversial logician and theologian of twelfth-century France, the celebrated lover of Héloïse and enemy of Bernard of Clairvaux.

ADAM OF EBRACH First Abbot of the Cistercian monastery of Ebrach (founded in 1127), between Kitzingen and Bamberg in the Main region. Originally a monk at Morimond, Adam had assisted his friend Bernard of Clairvaux in preaching the Crusade in 1147, and in 1152 he was sent by Barbarossa as an envoy to Pope Eugenius III. He met Hildegard during her first preaching tour, between 1158 and 1161.

ADELHEID OF GANDERSHEIM (d. 1184) Nun and abbess. Brought up in the same household as her young aunt Richardis of Stade, she also joined Hildegard's convent but left in 1151 to become Abbess of Gandersheim in eastern Germany. In 1160 she also acquired a similar position as head of a community of canons at Quedlinburg.

ÆLRED OF RIEVAULX (1109–67) Cistercian abbot from Rievaulx, North Yorkshire. Author of *The Mirror of Love* (1142–3), written at the instigation of Bernard of Clairvaux, and *On Spiritual Friendship* (1150–65), a classic expression of monastic friendship.

ALAN OF LILLE (d. 1203) Poet and theologian. Probably studied and taught at Paris, *c*. 1150–*c*. 1185. Influenced by Gilbert Porreta. Among his literary works are the *Plaint of Nature* in prose and verse, in which the main character is the personified figure of Nature, and the allegorical poem *Anticlaudianus* (1182–3).

ALCUIN OF YORK (*c.* 740–804) A major scholar, teacher and writer at the court of Charlemagne. In his biblical scholarship, he promoted the Vulgate text, which came to be accepted as the standard version of the Bible in the medieval West.

ALEXANDER III, POPE (d. 1181) Orlando (or Rolandus) Bandinelli. Papal chancellor under Eugenius III, he was elected Pope in 1159 on the death of Hadrian IV, and immediately faced a rival antipope Victor IV elected by the supporters of Emperor Frederick Barbarossa. Throughout the long schism with the Emperor, Alexander III lived mostly in France, and nurtured contacts with Henry II, King of England, whom he forced to do penance after the murder of Thomas Becket. Alexander presided over the Third Lateran Council in 1179, which gave the exclusive right of electing a pope to a two-thirds majority of the cardinals.

AMBROSIUS AUTPERTUS (d. 784) Writer and theologian. Born in Provence, he became a monk of St Vincent near Capua in Italy *c.* 740 and was elected Abbot in 777. His main work is a commentary on Revelation, but he also wrote the *Conflict of the Vices and Virtues*, which appears to have influenced Hildegard's *Book of Life's Merits*.

ARNOLD OF BRESCIA A native of Brescia in Lombardy and a fiery reformer. Unlike Hildegard, he encouraged lay people not to accept the sacraments from priests guilty of simony; he also preached the disendowment of pope and clergy. As supporter and then leader of the Roman Senate, he drove out Pope Eugenius III from Rome and was excommunicated in 1148. In 1152 the Senate lost control of Rome, and Arnold was finally overthrown and hanged in 1155 during the pontificate of Pope Hadrian IV.

ARNOLD, ARCHBISHOP OF COLOGNE Archbishop of Cologne before Rainald of Dassel, Arnold wrote to Hildegard requesting a copy of *Scivias* (see 32 and, for Hildegard's response, 16).

ARNOLD, ARCHBISHOP OF MAINZ (Served as Archbishop 1153–60) Well regarded by King Conrad III, he was elected Archbishop of Mainz at Frederick Barbarossa's instigation. In 1158 Arnold issued two charters confirming the agreement Hildegard had made with the Disibodenberg to secure the property rights and income of the Rupertsberg and to arrange for priests to take services and perform other clerical duties for the community. During his period in office, he came into conflict with the Count Palatine Hermann of Stahleck and also had problems raising the tribute for Barbarossa's Italian expeditions. On 1 November 1159 he placed the whole city of Mainz under excommunication before joining Barbarossa in Italy. On his return the dispute worsened and Arnold was killed during the violence that followed.

AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO (354–430) St Augustine, Bishop of Hippo in North Africa, is probably the most famous of the four 'Doctors of the Church'. His influence was enormous, and his numerous works include *Confessions, On the Trinity, Christian Teaching, The Catechism of the Unlearned* as well as numerous other treatises and sermons.

BASSUM Monastery in the diocese of Bremen where Richardis of Stade was appointed Abbess.

BENEDICTINE ORDER The traditional Western European monasticism, founded by St Benedict of Nursia (*c*. 480–*c*. 550); Benedict's Rule for Monasteries regulated the Divine Office (Latin *opus Dei*), the daily pattern of worship and prayer divided into eight 'offices': matins at the end of the night, lauds at daybreak, prime, terce, sext and none during the day, vespers in the evening, and compline at sunset. The offices during the hours of daylight were interspersed with periods of work and reading. Hildegard wrote a commentary on the Rule, probably in the period 1151–8.

BERNARD OF CHARTRES (*c*. 1080–*c*. 1130) From *c*. 1114, master of the famous cathedral school of Chartres. According to one of his pupils, John of Salisbury, Bernard revered the arts and knowledge of ancient Greece and Rome which he saw as far exceeding that of his own day; for Bernard, his contemporaries were ‘dwarfs, standing on the shoulders of the giants’.

BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX (1090–1153) Born in Burgundy, Bernard of Fontaines became famous under the name of the Cistercian monastery he founded in 1115 and ruled as abbot until his death in 1153. The most important Cistercian of his time, he wrote numerous works, including letters, sermons, satirical works and spiritual writings. An ascetic in his early years, Bernard became more politically involved after 1128, intervening in disputes between important figures in the Church. In 1140 his influence led to the condemnation of the teachings of Peter Abelard at the Council of Sens. After the election in 1145 of Pope Eugenius III, a Cistercian from Clairvaux, Bernard undertook preaching tours against heresy in the Languedoc, Bordeaux, Toulouse and Albis. From 1146 to 1147 he preached the Second Crusade, which subsequently failed in 1149. In this period he secured the acceptance of Hildegard’s writings at the Synod of Trier (1147–8).

BERNARD SILVESTER Bernardus Silvestris, poet and philosopher. Of the same generation as William of Conches, Gilbert of Poitiers and John of Salisbury. Little is known of his life apart from reminiscences of contemporaries. He taught at Tours, probably between 1130 and 1140, and had some connections with Chartres. His major work is the allegorical poem *Cosmographia*.

BESANÇON A papal embassy from Hadrian IV met Emperor Frederick Barbarossa and his chancellor, Rainald of Dassel, at the Diet (Assembly) of Besançon in October 1157, and a dispute arose over whether the emperor should receive the imperial crown as

a benefice (Latin *beneficium*) from the pope. Part of the problem may have been Rainald's inflammatory translation of the ambiguous term *benficium* as 'fief' rather than as 'gift'. The row provoked the emperor into asserting his rights by sacred Roman law to the free crown of the 'holy empire', and it contributed to the later schism between emperor and pope from 1159 to 1177.

BOETHIUS (*c*. 480–*c*.524) The Roman statesman and Neoplatonist philosopher; author of works on the Greek science of Euclid, Porphyry and Aristotle, as well as his prison writing *The Consolation of Philosophy*, which was widely read in the Middle Ages. In his theological writings, the *Opuscula sacra*, he wrote on the Trinity and the Person of Christ.

BONIFACE, SAINT (*c*. 675–754) Wynfrith of Wessex, England, later known as Saint Boniface. The 'Apostle of Germany', he was martyred in 754 at Dokkum in Frisia. In *c*. 746 he had become the first Archbishop of Mainz. Since her convent lay within the diocese of Mainz, Hildegard held the memory of Boniface in particular respect and wrote an antiphon in his honour.

BOOK OF DIVINE WORKS Latin title *Liber divinorum operum*. Alternative title *De operatione Dei* ('On the Activity of God'). Hildegard's third large-scale visionary work, written in the period 1163–73/4 and divided into three parts covering the position of the human being, the earth and the cosmos in the divine scheme of things. There are four manuscripts: (1) the Gent manuscript (Gent, University Library, cod. 241), important because it is evidently the original copy dictated or written by Hildegard and then heavily corrected; (2) Troyes, Bibliothèque municipale, cod. 683, originally from Clairvaux; (3) the Riesenkodex; and (4) the Lucca manuscript, important for its illustrations.

BOOK OF LIFE'S MERITS Latin title *Liber vitae meritorum*, sometimes translated as 'The Book of the Rewards of Life'. The second of Hildegard's three visionary works, written in 1158–63, it centres

on the divine figure of a Man looking out to different parts of the world. Especially concerned with ethical issues, five of its six parts or 'books' consist of dialogue-contests between 35 opposing pairs of vices and virtues, arranged in groups of five, seven or eight pairs. The theme of the sixth book is eschatology and the joys of heaven. Four of the six manuscripts are from the twelfth century and are associated with monasteries known to Hildegard: (1) the Dendermonde codex from the Abbey of Villers; (2) the Berlin manuscript (Berlin, SB Preuss. Kulturerbes cod. lat. theol. 727) associated with St Jacob in Mainz; (3) the Trier manuscript (Trier, Seminarbibliothek cod. 68) from the monastery of St Eucharius in Trier; and (4) the Riesenkodex from the Rupertsberg.

CAESARIUS OF ARLES (*c*. 470–542) Writer and churchman. Archbishop of Arles from 502. His writings, particularly his sermons directed at a popular audience, were influential in the early medieval period.

CALLISTUS III Abbot John of Struma. The third 'antipope' of Frederick Barbarossa's reign; elected in 1168 as successor to Paschal III.

CANONS REGULAR or AUGUSTINIAN CANONS *The Rule of St Augustine*, a text attributed to Augustine of Hippo, became popular during the pontificate of Gregory VII, and led to the foundation of communities of clerks known as canons regular, or Augustinian canons, in the eleventh century.

CANOSSA The castle near Reggio/Emilia in Northern Italy where Henry IV, King of Germany, did penance before Pope Gregory VII in February 1076. The event is emblematic of the strained relationship between emperor and pope which was to dog the political life of the twelfth century.

CATHARISM A religious movement that broke away from the Catholic Church and was condemned as heretical. The Cathars, i.e. the 'pure ones' (known in France as Albigensians), had extreme

dualist beliefs, teaching that the matter of the world and the human body were evil and diametrically opposed to the life of the soul. While their clergy ('the perfect') were very ascetic, their laity (the 'believers') were reported to be extremely lax. The movement spread to Germany from the 1140s. Despite some unconscious dualist tendencies, Hildegard's theology was based on the idea of the human being as a whole unity and as the centre of a good creation, a microcosm of the wider macrocosm. Her sermon in Cologne during her third preaching tour (1161–3) specifically attacked the Cathars.

CAUSE ET CURE Usually translated as 'Causes and Cures', although the *Latin cura* also means 'care'. Alternative title *Liber compositae medicine* ('The Book of Composite Medicine'). Hildegard's study of human health, written 1151-8. Together with *Physica*, it may have originally formed a single work known as *Liber subtilitatum diversarum naturarum creaturarum* ('The Book of the Subtleties of the Diverse Natures of Creatures'). The work survives in one thirteenth-century manuscript (Copenhagen, Kgl. Bibl., cod. 90b) and in a fragment of a manuscript (Berlin, SB Preuss. Kulturerbes, cod. lat. Qu. 674).

CHARLEMAGNE (*c.* 742–814) Charles the Great, King of Germany 768–814, whose coronation as Emperor in 800 set a stamp on the politics of medieval Europe. In 1165 he was canonized as a saint at the instigation of one of his powerful successors, Frederick Barbarossa, who sought thereby to gain prestige for his own position as Holy Roman Emperor.

CHRISTIAN DE BUCH After the papal supporter Archbishop Conrad of Mainz fled the city before the imperial forces, Frederick Barbarossa appointed Christian de Buch as Archbishop of Mainz. Christian was also the imperial chancellor and general of Frederick's forces. He helped effect a reconciliation between the Emperor and the Pope at Venice in 1177 and was away in Rome

when the prelates of Mainz imposed the interdict on the Rupertsberg in 1179. Hildegard eventually wrote to Christian asking him to lift the ban, and Christian agreed, placing the matter in the hands of Philip, Archbishop of Cologne, the neighbouring diocese. But at the intervention of one of the Mainz prelates, the interdict was reinstated. Only after Hildegard had appealed to Christian in a second letter was the ban lifted; Christian sent Hildegard a personal apology.

CISTERCIAN ORDER A twelfth-century reform movement based on Benedictine monasticism, the Cistercians questioned both the elaborate liturgy and the close connections with the feudal order which had developed in the earlier Cluniac movement. The order emphasized meditative reading and manual labour as important features of a monk's daily life, but also inspired literary talent, particularly in the works of Bernard of Clairvaux and Ælred of Rievaulx.

CÎTEAUX (Latin name: Cistercium) Monastery near Dijon in France, founded by Robert of Molesmes in 1098; the mother house of the Cistercian movement, efficiently organized by its abbot Stephen Harding from 1108.

CLUNIACS An important movement for the reform of the Benedictine monastic order in the eleventh and early twelfth centuries. The Cluniacs advocated a close adherence to the spirit of the Benedictine Rule, along with extremely elaborate and splendid worship, which left little time for manual labour (for which they came to be criticized). Their principles inspired Pope Gregory VII's reforms, especially against simony and clerical marriage. An important Cluniac reformer in the twelfth century was Peter the Venerable, who clashed with Bernard of Clairvaux.

CLUNY Near Mâcon in Burgundy, France; the monastery, founded in 909/10, became the centre of the Cluniac reform.

CONRAD III King and Emperor of Germany from 1137 to 1152. As a member of the Hohenstaufen dynasty, his election to the throne in preference to the Welf Henry the Proud, Duke of Bavaria and Saxony, led to rivalry between the two factions. Hildegard wrote a letter of spiritual encouragement to Conrad in 1150.

CONRAD, ARCHBISHOP OF MAINZ (1161–5 and 1183–1200) Conrad (or Konrad) of Wittelsbach, brother of Duke Otto of Bavaria. Conrad is one of the named witnesses of the imperial edict of protection for the Rupertsberg convent on 14 April 1163. Although his election as Archbishop of Mainz had been pushed by Frederick Barbarossa, Conrad nevertheless supported the Pope, and in 1164 on the death of the antipope Victor IV urged Barbarossa to come to terms with Alexander III. On 23 May 1165, at the imperial court held in Würzburg, he refused to recognize the new antipope Paschal III; Barbarossa reacted by removing him from office and replacing him with Christian de Buch. Conrad fled to Alexander in France and then to Rome, where he was appointed Cardinal Bishop of S. Sabina. From 1169 he was active as a papal legate, and after the Peace of Venice in 1177, he renounced his claim to the archbishopric of Mainz until the death of Christian in 1183.

CREMONA Venue of the Synod in 1148 at which Arnold of Brescia was excommunicated, shortly after Hildegard's writings were approved at the Synod of Trier.

CRUSADES The series of expeditions, often inspired by public sermons on the 'taking of the Cross', which aimed to recover the Holy Lands, Jerusalem and Palestine, from Islam and retain them as part of Christendom. The First Crusade (1095–99) was a notable success, but the second, preached by Bernard of Clairvaux in 1146–7, came to a disastrous end in 1149. In 1187 Saladin took Jerusalem, which led to the moderately successful Third Crusade (1189–92), in which Richard the Lionheart of England, Philip II

of France, and Emperor Frederick Barbarossa of Germany all took part. Though Anselm of Canterbury in the eleventh century was opposed to such ventures, most writers in Hildegard's day seem to have supported the aims of the Crusades.

DENDERMONDE A monastery in Belgium. Codex 9 of its library is the manu-script originally owned by the monastery of Villers in Hildegard's lifetime which contains the oldest version of Hildegard's *Symphonia* and an important copy of *The Book of Life's Merits*.

DISIBOD A seventh-century Irish bishop who retired to a hermitage near the confluence of the rivers Nahe and Glan in the Rhineland. Despite founding a monastery on the hill overlooking the site, he remained in the hermitage until his death at the age of 81. Hildegard held him in great respect, writing a *Life of Disibod* and several songs in his honour.

DISBODENBERG The hill and site of the monastery founded by the Irishman Disibod in the early Middle Ages and refounded at the beginning of the twelfth century. It was here that Hildegard began her monastic life as a child recluse under the tutelage of Jutta of Spanheim. The records disagree as to when they moved there: 1106 according to the *Life of Hildegard* or 1112 according to the *Life of futta*. The anchorage eventually became a community of nuns with Jutta as abbess; in effect, the institution became a double monastery of monks and nuns under the final authority of the abbot. Hildegard succeeded Jutta as abbess of the convent in 1136, remaining there until she founded the autonomous community on the Rupertsberg in about 1150.

EBERHARD, BISHOP OF BAMBERG Elected Bishop in 1146 and consecrated by Pope Eugenius III. Eberhard had good relations with Frederick Barbarossa, taking part in the Italian campaigns, and as a reward for his support, the abbey of Niederalteich was placed under the control of the bishopric of Bamberg. In 1157

he responded to a request from Hildegard and provided a building in Bamberg as a new convent for the use of Gertrud of Stahleck and her fellow nuns. In 1163 he was the fifth witness on the imperial deed of protection for the Rupertsberg.

EBERHARD, BISHOP OF SALZBURG Born in 1085, Eberhard of Biburg and Hipoltstein became a canon in Bamberg, a monk at Prüfening and then an abbot of Biburg in the diocese of Regensburg. On 22 May 1149, he was consecrated Bishop of Salzburg. Politically active, his work pleased Conrad III, although he did not frequent the imperial court as much as his friend Eberhard of Bamberg. During the schism, he supported Pope Alexander III and opposed the election of antipopes such as Victor IV in 1162. Nevertheless, he remained a presence among Frederick Barbarossa's followers and acted as a mediator between emperor and pope. In 1163, he attended the imperial court at Mainz, and was the third witness on the imperial deed of protection for the Rupertsberg.

ECKBERT (EKBERT) OF SCHÖNAU (d.1184) Writer and preacher. Brother and adviser of the visionary Elisabeth of Schönau. From 1140 to 1146 he studied in Paris, where he was friends with Rainald of Dassel. He subsequently became a canon at St Cassius in Bonn, but after a pilgrimage to Rome in 1155 he became a priest and then, after persuasion by Elisabeth, a monk, joining the double monastery at Schönau. He eventually became abbot there. Among his many writings, he composed Thirteen Sermons against the Cathars, and he preached against this movement at Bonn before 1153, at Cologne in 1163 and at Koblenz in 1167.

EIBINGEN Founded by Hildegard *c.* 1165; a daughter monastery of the Rupertsberg.

ELISABETH OF SCHONAU (d. 1164) A visionary author who, like many others, experienced most of her visions in a state of ecstatic trance (in marked contrast to Hildegard's waking state). From

1147 a nun at Schönau. Her early visions, from 1152 to 1155, are devotional pieces on the lives of Christ and Mary. But from 1155, she employed her brother Eckbert to put her compositions down in writing, and under his influence the writings become more theological and doctrinal. Her main works are a work influenced by Scivias known as *The Book of the Ways of God* (compiled in 1156–7), an elaboration of the Ursula legend entitled *The Revelations of the Holy Army of the Virgins of Cologne* (1156–7) and a visionary treatise in support of the doctrine of the bodily resurrection of Mary (1156–9). Elisabeth corresponded with the older Hildegard for support and encouragement. She became *magistra* (abbess) of her community in 1157.

ERIGENA (ERIUGENA) John the Scot (*c*. 810–c. 877). Theologian and philosopher who attempted to reconcile the Neoplatonist idea of emanation (i.e. the origin of everything that exists from the One) with the Christian idea of creation. His greatest work, *Periphyseon, or the Division of Nature*, was possibly known to Hildegard; she perhaps knew his ideas through excerpts in the works of Honorius of Autun.

EUGENIUS III (d. 1153) Bernardo Pignatelli of Pisa, elected Pope in 1145. In 1135 he had joined the Cistercian Abbey of Clairvaux under Bernard. On his election as Pope he refused to recognize the Roman Senate and had to flee from Rome to Farfa and Viterbo and then in 1147 to France, where he commissioned Bernard to preach the Second Crusade. Eugenius held synods at Paris (1147), Trier (1147–8) where he personally read out and approved Hildegard's writings, Rheims (1148) where Gilbert Porreta's writings were scrutinized for heresy, and Cremona (1148), where he excommunicated Arnold of Brescia, now leader of the Senate. In 1149 he was able to return briefly to Rome, and again in 1153, when he died there. Essentially a

reformer and pious Cistercian, he exchanged a number of letters with Hildegard after the Synod of Trier.

FREDERICK BARBAROSSA, OR FREDERICK 1 (*c.* 1122–90) Frederick (Friedrich) of Swabia. King and Emperor of Germany. Elected King on the death of his uncle, Conrad III, in 1152, he united the two rival dynasties through his mother, a Guelph (Welf), and his father, a Hohenstaufen. In 1153 he signed a treaty of mutual support with Pope Eugenius III at Constance, and on 18 June 1155 he was crowned Emperor by Pope Hadrian IV, who honoured the Treaty of Constance. But relations between emperor and pope soon changed. Hadrian changed his policies and became reconciled with the Norman king of Sicily, William I, at the Concordat of Benevento, thus breaking the terms of the Treaty of Constance. At the Diet of Besançon in 1157, Frederick insisted on the emperor's rule of a 'holy empire', as against the spiritual jurisdiction of the pope (this eventually created the title of Holy Roman Emperor). After the papal election of 1159, he supported the 'antipope' Victor IV against Pope Alexander III, thus isolating himself from Italy, France and the Anglo-Norman world. The schism lasted almost eighteen years and led to bitter hostilities, including military action by imperial troops in German lands against monastic supporters of the pope. With the aim of establishing an imperial state in Lombardy, Barbarossa undertook six major Italian expeditions. In 1162 he took Milan. In 1167 he captured Rome, but had to withdraw because of a malaria epidemic. In the end, he failed to break the power of the Lombard communes and after his defeat at Legnano in 1176, he submitted to Pope Alexander III. In 1181 he overthrew a rival in Germany, Henry the Lion, the head of the Welf dynasty, and increased his power by the marriage in 1186 of his son Henry to Constance, heiress of Norman Sicily. Frederick Barbarossa died while on the Third Crusade in 1189.

GEBENO OF EBERBACH Eberbach, in the Rheingau, was a large Cistercian monastery with which Hildegard had personal contacts. She wrote to Abbot Ruthard in the 1150s and sent a letter of encouragement to the monks in the 1160s, a period when monasteries supporting the pope suffered oppression from imperial troops. In 1220, Prior Gebeno of Eberbach composed his *Mirror of Future Times, or Pentachronon* (i.e. The Five Ages), much of which consists of extracts from Hildegard's apocalyptic or prophetic writings, including such correspondence as the letter to King Conrad III (*c*. 1150; 34) and the letter to the Cologne clerics (*c*. 1163). With its one-sided view of the range of her writings, the *Pentachronon* became the most widely known collection of Hildegard's work in the later Middle Ages.

GERALD OF WALES (Latin name: Giraldus Cambrensis) (*c*. 1146–1223) Writer, historian and churchman.

GERTRUD OF STAHLECK (d. 1191) Sister of King Conrad III and Barbarossa's aunt. Friend and correspondent of Hildegard. Her husband Hermann of Stahleck was a generous supporter of Hildegard's convent at Rupertsberg. After his death in 1156, Gertrud became a nun first at Wechterswinkel in the diocese of Würzburg and then, after Hildegard's intervention with Bishop Eberhard of Bamberg, at the new foundation of St Theodore and St Mary at Bamberg.

GILBERT PORRETA (*c*. 1080–1154) Otherwise known as Gilbert de la Porrée or Gilbert of Poitiers. Biblical commentator and scholastic theologian. After studying under Bernard of Chartres and Anselm of Laon, he became a well-known master at Paris. In 1142 he was appointed Bishop of Poitiers. Interested in logic and the language of theology, his statements in his commentary on Boethius's *opuscula* that 'God is one' and 'God is three' led to great controversy, particularly at the Synod of Rheims in 1148. Hildegard was involved in this debate when asked for advice on

the matter by a master of Paris, Odo of Soissons, in a letter written between 1148 and 1150 (see 32; and for Hildegard's reply, see 4).

GOTTFRIED OF DISIBODENBERG (Latin name: Godefridus monachus) The monk of Disibodenberg who became Hildegard's secretary in 1174, a year after the death of Volmar. His *Life of Hildegard* was incomplete when he died in 1176, and was finished by Theoderich of Echternach.

GOTTFRIED OF STRASSBURG Middle High German poet. Author of the Arthurian epic *Tristan* (*c*. 1210).

GREGORY THE GREAT (*c*. 540–604) From 590 Pope Gregory I. Regarded in the Middle Ages along with Ambrose, Augustine and Jerome as one of the four great 'Doctors of the Church'. His many writings include the *Moralia* (a commentary on Job), homilies on the gospels, and the *Pastoral Care*, a guide to the psychology of teaching and ministry.

GREGORY VII, POPE (1073–85) Hildebrand, a native of Tuscany (born between 1015 and 1034), became one of the most influential popes of the period. At the Lenten Synod of 1074, he issued decrees against simony, i.e. the payment of money to promote people to higher offices in the Church, and against clerical marriage. He also sought to gain exclusive control over the appointment of bishops. This led to the 'investiture controversy', for he was almost immediately opposed by the king of the German Empire, Henry IV, who wished to retain investiture along with royal power over bishops. The long and bitter disputes between pope and king continued in the twelfth century, with frequent papal excommunications of the German kings, who reacted by electing their own 'antipopes'.

GREGORY IX (*c*. 1148–1241) Pope from 1227. During his pontificate, in 1233, the canonization protocol was commissioned to provide evidence for Hildegard's sanctity. This was rejected on its

completion and returned for revision in 1237, but the revised version apparently never reached Pope Innocent IV, who wrote a letter in 1243 asking for the new claim to be submitted.

GUIBERT OF GEMBLOUX (German name: Wibert) (1124/5–1213) Writer and monk of Gembloux near Namur in Flanders. Extremely learned, he was considerably influenced by the Latin classics in his style of writing. During the 1170s, Hildegard's reputation reached Guibert and he became a great admirer of her work. From 1175, therefore, he began a correspondence with her which culminated in a visit to the Rupertsberg in the autumn of that year. He also prepared the *Thirty-Eight Questions* with the monks of the monastery of Villers and sent it to Hildegard in 1176. From 1177 Guibert served as Hildegards secretary until her death in 1179; he returned to Gembloux in 1180. In 1188/9 he was Abbot of Florennes near Namur and then from 1194 Abbot of Gembloux.

HADRIAN IV, POPE (*c.* 1100–59) Nicholas Breakspear, the only English Pope. In 1154, he secured the expulsion of Arnold of Brescia from Rome and in 1155 obtained homage from Frederick Barbarossa before agreeing to his coronation as Emperor. In 1157 his legates met Frederick at Besançon and delivered his claim that the Emperor held his position as a 'benefice' from the Pope. This led to a severe dispute, which eventually became a schism during the pontificate of Alexander III. Hildegard wrote an admonitory letter to him on his election to the papal see in 1154.

HARTWIG, ARCHBISHOP OF BREMEN Hartwig of Stade, Archbishop of Bremen 1148–68. His sister was Richardis of Stade, the nun and friend of Hildegard at Disibodenberg. Their parents were Rudolf I, Margrave of Stade in North Germany (d. 1124) and Margravine (or Marchioness) Richardis, originally of Spanheim-Lavanttal (d. 1151); the Margravine's second cousin was Jutta of

Spanheim. After the death of his brother Rudolf in 1144, Hartwig was involved in an inheritance dispute with Henry the Lion, Duke of Saxony, who imprisoned him. On his appointment in 1148, he aimed to extend the power of his archbishopric in Scandinavia and then north-east Germany, in 1149 reestablishing the three bishoprics of Oldenburg, Mecklenburg and Ratzburg. But at the Diet of Goslar in 1154 Henry the Lion was given the power to invest the three bishops, despite Hartwig's protests. In the same year he fell into disfavour with Frederick Barbarossa for refusing to perform military service on the imperial expedition to Italy. In 1166 he supported the revolt in Saxony against Henry the Lion.

HEINRICH, ARCHBISHOP OF MAINZ (1142–53) As head of the local diocese, Heinrich was at first a great encourager for Hildegard. He supported her at the Synod of Trier of 1147–8, and at the instigation of Richardis's mother, Margravine Richardis of Spanheim-Lavanttal, he persuaded Abbot Kuno of Disibodenberg to allow Hildegard to found the abbey at Rupertsberg. On 1 May 1152, he consecrated the new church there, but the same year saw the demise of his career when he failed to support the election of Frederick Barbarossa as King and Emperor. In 1153 Heinrich was deposed, despite an appeal from Hildegard to Pope Eugenius III.

HEINRICH OF VELDEKE Author of the Middle High German poem *Eneit* (1170s), based on classical sources; an early example of the vernacular literature that was beginning to flourish at the end of Hildegard's career.

HELENGER Abbot of Disibodenberg (1155–79). A regular correspondent with Hildegard.

HENRY II King of England (1154–89).

HENRY IV (or HEINRICH IV) (1050–1106) King and Emperor of Germany from 1056, he was declared of age in 1065. His reign

is characterized by wars with the rebel Saxon princes and conflicts with Pope Gregory VII, particularly over the investiture of bishops and abbots. In 1077 he submitted to the Pope at Canossa, but the conflict was later renewed. Henry installed an antipope Clement III at Rome in 1084, who crowned him Emperor in the same year.

HENRY V Henry IV's successor (1106–25). During his reign the investiture controversy was settled at the Concordat of Worms (1122).

HENRY VI King of Germany and Holy Roman Emperor (1190–7). Frederick Barbarossa's successor.

HENRY OF LIÈGE (German name: Heinrich von Lüttich) Henry of Leyen, probably a monk at Bilsen near Maastricht. Served as Bishop of Liège 1145-64. He was loyal to the Emperor, and his name appears on many of Frederick Barbarossa's charters. He took part in the first Italian expedition of 1154, attending the Emperor's coronation in 1155. In 1163, he was to be the seventh witness on the imperial deed of protection for the Rupertsberg convent.

HENRY THE LION (1129–95) Duke of Saxony and Bavaria and head of the Welf dynasty. At first enjoying good relations with the Emperor, Frederick Barbarossa, he took part in the first Italian campaign of 1154 and 1155 and in return was given back the duchy of Bavaria by Barbarossa in 1156. He expanded Saxony eastwards, developing Lüneburg, Bremen, Lubeck and Braunschweig (Brunswick). He was a lifelong enemy of Hartwig of Bremen, with whom he disputed the jurisdiction of three north-eastern bishoprics. In 1166 he was opposed by a League of princes and then finally in 1180 by Barbarossa. He was exiled twice (1181–5, 1189–90) and became reconciled to the Emperor (Henry VI) in 1194.

HERMANN, BISHOP OF CONSTANCE Imperial supporter. Served as Bishop of Constance in southern Germany to 1166. In 1140, Hermann corresponded with Bernard of Clairvaux, who warned him of Arnold of Brescia, at that time in Constance. In March 1153 he presided over the wedding ceremony of Frederick Barbarossa and Adelheid of Vohburg. In 1154 he took part in the Italian campaign and as a result had all his properties confirmed by the Emperor in 1155. On 22 May he was one of many bishops who supported the antipope Paschal III. Hildegard's letters to Hermann are critical and admonitory.

HERMAS Christian visionary author of the second century. The *Shepherd* of Hermas appears to have influenced Hildegard with its emphasis on visions, its teaching on the virtues, and its use of architectural imagery as in the later parts of *Scivias*.

HERRAD OF LANDSBERG (d. 1196) Female writer and from about 1178 head of a community of Augustinian canons at Hohenbourg near Strassbourg. Author and compiler of the illustrated theological textbook, *The Garden of Delights* (1160s and 70s).

HONORIUS 'OF AUTUN' Popular writer on theology active in the early twelfth century. Probably not from Autun, he possibly became a monk in Germany and spent time in England, where he composed his *Elucidarium*, a survey of Christian doctrine with parallels to Hildegard's *Scivias* in coverage of themes. His later work *Gemma animae* uses allegory and symbolism to discuss the liturgy, while his *Imago mundi* treats cosmology and geography.

HUGH OF ST VICTOR (d. 1142) Theologian at St Victor, a house of Augustinian canons in Paris, which he joined in about 1115. Author of the large survey of doctrine *The Sacraments of the Christian Faith*, the mystical treatise *The Ark of Noah* and the widely used textbook on the arts known as *Didascalicon*.

HUGO (d. 1177) One of Hildegard's brothers. Cathedral cantor at Mainz. He assisted Hildegard for a short period as secretary after

the death of Gottfried of Disibodenberg.

JOACHIM OF FIORE (*c.* 1135–1202) Biblical commentator and writer, with a strong interest in mysticism and prophecy, particularly his idea of the 'three ages' of the world corresponding to the three persons of the Trinity. At first a monk of the Benedictine, and later Cistercian, monastery of Corazzo, he unwillingly agreed to be elected Abbot in 1177 but eventually retired, with papal approval, to the Sila mountains in 1196.

JOHN OF SALISBURY (*c.* 1115–80) Humanist, writer and churchman. After studying in Paris under Abelard, William of Conches and Gilbert Porreta, he entered the diplomatic service of Theobald, Archbishop of Canterbury, from 1147 and of Thomas Becket from 1161. In December 1170 he was present in Canterbury when Becket was murdered by Henry II's men. From 1176 he was Bishop of Chartres, and he took part in the Third Lateran Council in 1179. His writings include the *political* study Policraticus, the textbook *Metalogicon* and the *History of the Popes*.

JUTTA OF SPANHEIM (or SPONHEIM) Daughter of Count Stephan of Spanheim and member of an influential Rhineland family. With a clear vocation for the life of a recluse, she became guardian to the eight-year-old Hildegard after her parents had dedicated her to the spiritual life. She was later Abbess of the convent at Disibodenberg until her death in 1136. Her brother Count Meginhard of Spanheim gave financial and material assistance to the foundation of Hildegard's convent at Rupertsberg in the 1150s.

KUNO Abbot of Disibodenberg from 1136 to 1155.

KÜRENBERG Twelfth-century poet from Austria. Known as 'der von Kürenberg', he wrote in Middle High German rather than Latin. Author of the celebrated 'Falcon Song' (1160s).

LAMPRECHT German writer, a pioneer in the use of the vernacular. He wrote his poem *Alexander* in the 1140s.

LINGUA IGNOTA Hildegard's 'Unknown Language', compiled as a glossary in the period 1151–8.

LUCCA MANUSCRIPT A thirteenth-century manuscript held at Lucca (Bibl. Governativa, cod. 1942) containing a series of illustrations to *The Book of Divine Works*.

LUDWIG OF TRIER Abbot of St Eucharius in Trier and personal acquaintance of Hildegard. Along with Gottfried of Echternach, Ludwig commissioned Theoderich to write the *Life of Hildegard* in the 1180s.

MACROBIUS Macrobius Ambrosius Theodosius, fifth-century Roman writer. Author of *The Dream of Scipio*, a work on number-mysticism, oracles, virtue, astronomy, music, geography and the soul. The work was widely read in the Middle Ages and helped to transmit Neoplatonist ideas to the Latin West.

MARIE DE FRANCE A contemporary woman author of very different inclinations from Hildegard's, who wrote tales of chivalry and romance in her native French. She probably lived in England.

ODO OF SOISSONS, or ODO OF PARIS A master at Paris who wrote to Hildegard in 1148 to find out her understanding of the nature of God and the Trinity as discussed at the controversial Council of Rheims, where Gilbert Porreta withdrew some of his more audacious statements on the question.

ORDO VIRTUTUM Hildegard's 'Play of the Virtues', originally conceived in a shorter version in the final vision of Book 3 of *Scivias* and rewritten as a separate play or opera in the period 1151–8.

PASCHAL III Guido of Crema. At the instigation of Rainald of Dassel, imperial chancellor, he was elected antipope in 1164 after the death of Victor IV. At Christmas 1165, he canonized

Charlemagne. On his death in 1168 he was succeeded by a further antipope, Callistus III.

PETER LOMBARD (*c*. 1100–60) Theologian and teacher at Paris from 1143 or 1144. He attended the Council of Rheims in 1148, where he opposed Gilbert Porreta. Author of the *Sentences*, a classic textbook of medieval theology arranged in four books to cover (1) the Trinity, (2) creation and sin, (3) the incarnation and virtues, (4) the sacraments and the four last things.

PHYSICA Alternative title *Liber simplicis medicinae* ('Book of Simple Medicine'). Written 1151–8. Hildegard's survey of the phenomena of the natural world (plants, metals, stones etc.) and their medicinal uses. Together with *Causes and Cures*, it may have originally formed a single work known as *Liber subtilitatum diversarum naturarum creaturarum* ('The Book of the Subtleties of the Diverse Natures of Creatures'). Three complete manuscripts survive, one from the thirteenth and two from the fifteenth centuries.

PRUDENTIUS Aurelius Clemens Prudentius (348–*c*. 410). Christian poet of the late Roman Empire. Apart from his hymns, he is best known for his *Psychomachia*, an allegorical poem about the struggle of the Soul and the Church, in which seven vices are overcome by the powers of seven virtues.

PTOLEMY Claudius Ptolemaeus. Greek astronomer writing at Alexandria from AD 146 to 170. His writings, especially his textbook the *Almagest*, were particularly influential.

RAINALD OF DASSEL (*c*. 1118/20–67) Important politician in Germany. In 1153 he was part of the embassy sent to Eugenius III in Rome; from 1156 he was Chancellor of the German Empire and from 1159 Archbishop of Cologne. Between 1158 and 1164 he led the imperial troops on their expeditions to Italy. It was his reading of the pope's letter at the Diet of Besançon that led to a rift between emperor and pope. During the schism his

excommunication by Alexander III in 1163 led to his insistence on the election of a new antipope, Paschal III, in 1164.

RICHARDIS (d. 1151) Richardis, Margravine (Marchioness) of Spanheim-Lavanttal. Influential noblewoman, widow of Rudolf I of Stade, mother of the nun Richardis and of the churchman Hartwig of Bremen, grandmother and guardian of Adelheid of Gandersheim. Related to Jutta of Spanheim. She intervened on Hildegard's behalf with Archbishop Heinrich of Mainz to gain his support for the move to Rupertsberg.

RICHARDIS OF STADE (d. 1152) A nun of Hildegard's community and a close friend and assistant. Richardis left Rupertsberg to become the Abbess of Bassum in 1151, which led to an emotional dispute recorded in a number of highly personal letters (see 12).

RIESENKODEX (i.e. 'Giant Codex') The large compilation of Hildegard's works copied at the Rupertsberg after her death. The book is manuscript 2 in the collection of the Hessische Landesbibliothek in Wiesbaden, Germany.

RUPERT OF DEUTZ (*c.* 1075–1129) A monk of Liège who became Abbot of Deutz near Cologne in 1120. His work of 1125, *On the Glory and Honour of the Son of Man*, a commentary on Matthew, mentions visions which, rather like Hildegard, he had experienced for a long time without revealing this to others.

RUPERT, SAINT A legendary young prince in the Rhineland during the Carolingian period who became devout after a pilgrimage to Rome at the age of fifteen, whereupon he gave away his property and built churches and hospices on his extensive lands. After his death aged twenty his mother Bertha founded a monastery in his honour at the Rupertsberg.

RUPERTSBERG A hill overlooking the junction of the River Nahe with the Rhine at Bingen. The site of a shrine to Saint Rupert which was destroyed by the Vikings in the ninth century. Hildegard

decided to locate her independent monastery there and moved from the Disibodenberg with a group of her nuns in about 1150.

RUPERTSBERG *SCIVIAS*, THE The famous Rupertsberg copy of Scivias (Wiesbaden, Hessische Landesbibliothek, manuscript 1) with illustrations done by artists probably under the direction of Hildegard herself. Lost in 1945, its text and artwork are preserved in photocopies and a colour facsimile at the Abbey of St Hildegard at Eibingen.

SALEM SCIVIAS, THE The twelfth-century Salem *Scivias*, with a different set of illustrations from those in the Rupertsberg manuscript. Now in Heidelberg University Library, cod. Sal. X 16.

SCIVIAS ('KNOW THE WAYS') Hildegard's first major work (1141–51), an encyclopedic survey of salvation history and Church doctrine, divided into three parts or 'books' of six, seven and thirteen visions respectively. The work survives in ten complete manuscripts, six of them from the twelfth century, including the illustrated Rupertsberg and Salem manuscripts.

TENGSWICH OF ANDERNACH Tengswich, or Tengswindis, was Mistress of Sankt Marien, a house of canons regular at Andernach in the Rhine Valley north of Bingen. In a letter dated 1148–50 (no. 52 in the *Collected Letters*), Tengswich criticized Hildegard's hierarchical attitudes, in particular her refusal to allow girls from lower down the social scale to join her community at Disibodenberg. She also asked whether it was true that on feast days Hildegard allowed her nuns to wear rings and diadems decorated with allegorical figures. This question, it is thought, may reflect accounts heard by Tengswich of a performance of *The Play of the Virtues*.

THEODORIC (THEODERICH) OF ECHTERNACH Monk and writer from Echternach (now in Luxembourg). Author of the second and third books of the *Life of Hildegard*, begun originally by Gottfried of Disibodenberg but not finished by the time of his death in

1176. Theoderich was commissioned to do the work by Ludwig of St Eucharius in Trier, a personal friend of Hildegard, and by Abbot Gottfried of Echternach. It was completed in the 1180s.

THOMAS À BECKET St Thomas Becket (*c.* 1120–70). From 1155 Chancellor of England under Henry II, he resigned when he was elected Archbishop of Canterbury in 1162. After his murder in 1170 by Henry's men, he was canonized by Pope Alexander II in 1173.

TIMAEUS Plato's work on cosmology; known in Western Europe in the twelfth century through a Latin translation by Chalcidius.

URSULA, SAINT According to the legend current in Hildegard's day, St Ursula was a British princess of the dark ages who renounced her marriage and travelled with 11,000 virgins on a pilgrimage to Rome. On their return journey, they were massacred by the barbarian Huns at Cologne. In the early twelfth century an old cemetery was uncovered in which they were supposedly buried, and their relics, a physical token of their virtue and influence, were widely distributed.

VICTOR IV Octavian of Santa Cecilia. Italian churchman and antipope (1159–64). In 1151 he was a papal legate to Germany and in 1155 led the advance guard at the coronation of Frederick Barbarossa in Rome. In 1159 he was involved in the disputed papal election with Roland (Alexander III), which began the eighteen-year schism within the Western Church.

VOLMAR (d. 1173) Monk of Disibodenberg. The first to encourage Hildegard in her writing, he became her secretary and moved with her to the Rupertsberg.

WILLIAM OF CONCHES (*c.* 1080–*c.* 1154) Philosopher and Christian humanist; pupil of Bernard of Chartres. His works include commentary glosses on Priscian's *Institutions of Grammar*, Plato's *Timaeus*, and Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*.